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ABSTRACT

This document consists of six issues (all of volume 2) of a newsletter subtitled "Dedicated to Helping Gifted Children Reach their Full Potential". These issues deal with all aspects of parenting and educating gifted children. Major articles include: "Re-examining the Concept of Underachievement" (Joanne Rand Whitmore); "Student Interests: A Key to Reversing the Underachievement Pattern" (Linda J. Emerick); "The Emotional Foundation of Gifted Girls" (Christine N. Garrison); "Gifted Girls' Self-Concept and Their Communication with Parents" (Carolyn M. Callahan and Dewey G. Cornell); "Reclaiming Lost Giftedness in Girls" (Linda Kreger Silverman); "Gaining Intimacy as a Talented Adolescent: A Primer for Parents" (Thomas M. Buescher); "Profiles of Creative Adolescents" (Jane Piirto); "Pathways to Thoughtfulness" (John Barell); "From Lower Order to Higher Order Learning" (Richard Paul); "Helping Our Students 'Wish To Learn'" (Janna Hugo); "The Exceptionally Gifted Child" (Miraca U. M. Gross and John F. Feldhusen); "Finding and Serving Gifted Preschoolers" (Mary L. Parkinson); "The Gift of Vision" (Lynn Fishman Hellerstein); "Tutoring Techniques for the Gifted" (Jeffrey N. Freed); and "Reasoning about Giftedness: A Response" (N. E. Jackson). Each issue also contains regularly appearing columns, such as "The Hidden Gifted Learner" (Suzanne M. Perry); "Kaleidoscope" (James R. Delisle); "Parenting" (Elizabeth Meckstroth); "Instructional Strategies" (Joyce VanTassel-Baska); "The Reading Room" (Stephanie S. Tolan); "The Highly Gifted" (Kathi Kearney); "Personality Plus" (Linda Kreger Silverman); "Bright Beginnings: The Young Gifted Child" (Martha Morelock); "In Search of Serendipity: Creative Ventures and Encounters" (Jerry Flack); "Adolescent Passages" (Thomas M. Buescher); "Antenna...Current Developments in Gifted Education" (Dorothy Knopper); and "From Parent to Parent" (author varies). (JDD)

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UNDERSTANDING OUR GIFTED™

Dedicated to helping gifted children reach their full potential

September - October, 1989

Volume 2, Issue 1

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FOCUS ON ... 3

... 5

... 6

... 14

... 15

... 16

... 17

... 18

... 19

Re-examining the Concept of Underachievement

Joanne Rand Whitmore, Ph.D.

Underachievement has been simply defined as school performance judged to be significantly below the level expected, based on some reliable evidence of potential for higher achievement. This pattern can be revealed through significant discrepancies between tests or subcomponents of tests, or between observed intellectual behavior and grades or test scores. Generally, underachievement is recognized when parents or teachers observe exceptional ability in one learning or performance activity that is startling because of a general pattern of lower performance. Underachievement also may occur suddenly, created by temporary circumstances, in the performance of previously consistent high achievers. That type of underachievement is easy to recognize and intervention is usually provided quickly.

Diverse Categories of Underachievers

In rethinking underachievement it is important to recognize that there are at least three different major categories included in this subpopulation of gifted *(Continued on page 7)*

Student Interests: A Key to Reversing The Underachievement Pattern

Linda J. Emerick, Ph.D.

Every school year, Tim "became an expert" on a topic of personal interest – Black History, radio broadcasting, and space travel had been previous areas of investigation. Now, in sixth grade, he was interested in whales and reading everything he could find on the topic. He had also written letters and made telephone calls to sealife experts at nearby aquariums. Unfortunately, Tim was not as conscientious and persistent regarding academic work in school. His increasingly poor performance led to many parent/teacher conferences and a decision was made to curtail his self-selected studies until missing assignments were completed and his academic standing improved drastically.

Heather loved to read and often carried library books to school to fill the time when her assignments were completed. She was reading far beyond her present fourth-grade level and had recently become interested in several classics. Like Tim, however, Heather was becoming more and more remiss *(Continued on page 10)*

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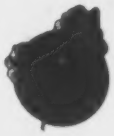

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Friends,

This issue marks the beginning of our second year, and I want to tell you how delighted I am with the feedback we continuously receive about the quality of ***Understanding Our Gifted***. Thank you for the wonderful support you have given us this year. Your comments enable us to continue to improve our publication. Keep writing!

The theme of this issue, "Underachievement," is important to everyone in the field. We are very proud to bring you articles by Dr. Joanne Whitmore and Dr. Linda Emerick, whose innovative studies have led to major breakthroughs in the reversal of underachievement. Both researchers warn against the destructiveness caused by blaming the child or the family for a student's underachievement pattern. Both give concrete suggestions for ameliorating the problem.

I often quote Dr. Abraham Tannenbaum's comparison of underachievement to a "skin rash." So many things can cause a skin rash: brushing into poison ivy, an allergic reaction to food, even a brain tumor. Until you know the cause, you cannot prescribe the correct medication. The same is true for underachievement. You cannot assume a child is just "lazy," or the family is dysfunctional. One child may need glasses, another may need a reading tutor, while a third may need counseling. Every case of underachievement cries out for **proper diagnosis**.

All underachievers deserve a comprehensive evaluation by a trained examiner. This examination should include an individual intelligence test to determine the level of the student's abilities, as well as his or her strengths and weaknesses; an assessment of self-concept; an interview with the parents; information from teachers; and an interview with the child to determine his or her interests, personal perspective on the problem, and recommendations for its solution. The results of the evaluation should be shared with all concerned.

As Joanne Whitmore has clearly shown in her research, the earlier intervention occurs, the better our chances of reversing the pattern. And, as Linda Emerick points out, the key to reaching a student is often through his or her interests. Most underachievers profit from a modified school program. In addition, some need counseling, tutoring or some form of therapeutic assistance.

When you see the signs of underachievement, **don't wait**. Obtain professional assistance as soon as possible. Find out what the child needs and begin a program of intervention.

Linda Silverman

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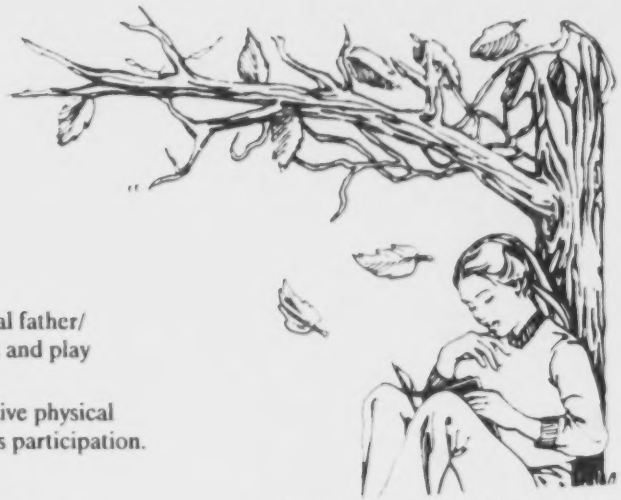
Suzanne M. Perry

HE HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

The Gifted Female (Part II)



In the last issue we discussed three kinds of behavior among gifted females that tend to mask their giftedness. *Disappearing giftedness* (Silverman, 1986) is a situation in which gifted girls appear to "lose" their giftedness as they move through the grades in school. *The Cinderella Complex* (Dowling, 1981) applies to gifted females who rely on others to check or confirm their giftedness rather than pursuing their own abilities independently. *The Imposter Phenomenon* (Clance and Imes, 1978) refers to females who fear being exposed as incompetent so they constantly feel a need to prove themselves.

What's A Parent To Do?

Various pilot strategies have been found successful in influencing gifted girls to challenge themselves more and to diminish the self defeating behaviors described above (Kerr, 1985). This research, along with strategies proposed by Silverman (1986), indicate some promising interventions for parents to try:

Nurture Your Daughter in a Nonsexist Environment

- Select toys that aren't sex typed.
- Avoid T.V. and video shows that perpetuate sex role stereotypes.
- Provide exposure to women who work in fields not "traditional for women."
- Rotate family tasks rather than assigning them along traditional sex role lines.
- Arrange special father/daughter work and play time together.
- Encourage active physical play and sports participation.

Provide Appropriate Role Models

- Take your daughter to your place of work and explain what you do.
- Help find a mentor or role model willing to share her life's challenges and celebrations.
- Have biographies of gifted women available for reading.
- Arrange for a junior high daughter to shadow a gifted professional woman.

Promote Math Interest and Proficiency

- Foster interest in math outside of school – show applications in building, cooking, medicine, architecture, art, strategy games etc.
- Encourage continued participation in math and science courses even after these become optional at school.
- Recommend participation in Advanced Placement (AP) math and science courses and AP. examinations where available.

Capitalize on Your Daughter's Abilities

- Encourage early entrance.
- Promote continuous progress acceleration at school.
- Nurture her self confidence and belief in her own abilities.
- Foster her ideas and interests.
- Advocate for her participation in gifted and enrichment classes.
- Encourage a demanding and varied high school program to leave as many career options open as possible.

Parental nurturing of gifted daughters can impact both their approach to life and their success in it. It's worth the effort. ■

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Elizabeth Meckstroth

PARENTING

The Inner Game Of Achievement

We look at giftedness from the inside out because that's where our children usually live – in their minds, in their hearts, in their imaginations... To understand what drives them, we need to delve into their invisible essences.

The work of Carl Jung (1971) helps us understand the inner world of the gifted. Jung's concepts about essential psychological qualities have been popularized by the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* (MBTI). When we appraise the generic gifted composite on the MBTI, we discern that these people are most often introverted and intuitive (Myers & McCaulley, 1985, p.107).

The introvert's internal world is captivating and has inexhaustible charm! Introverts have an intense need for privacy; they generate their energy by being alone. They can be depleted by being with other people. Introverts live in a world of ideas and meaning. They live their lives symbolically by focusing on the inner meaning of events. In American society, introverts are a minority...often crying in the wilderness.

The lens used by gifted individuals to view their world is intuitive. Thus, their known world is not limited by their experience. In their minds, they are chasing after every possibility. Our children are often the mystical dreamers who are rarely understood and appreciated.

If a child seems to be "underachieving" we need to try to enter that child's world and understand his or her perceptions. What our children perceive and want may be quite different from what parents and teachers perceive and want! To narrow the gap between potential and performance begin by discerning whose interests and needs are being met. Parents need to examine how a child's needs might require "underachievement." Children may underachieve when:

- The purpose of the assignment has little meaning to them.
- The rewards may not appear worth the effort.
- Projects involve what they already know.
- They are trying to gain acceptance from their peers.
- It can gain them the attention they crave.
- They are depressed and feeling misunderstood.
- They fear failure. By not trying, their ego is saved.

In the box below are some ways to help children develop confidence and reduce self-defeating behaviors.

Our children "*... are living evidence that this rich and varied world with its overflowing and intoxicating life is not purely external, but also exists within*" (Jung, 1971, p. 404). ■

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Elizabeth Meckstroth is a therapist and consultant in Dayton, Ohio and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child*.

OVERCOMING UNDERACHIEVEMENT

- **Respond to their needs, not to negative behaviors.**
- **ASK them to suggest ways that they would like to learn.**
- **Examine your own expectations. Do you need your children to make you look like a good parent?**
- **Have them explore, "In what ways will my decision help me and hurt me?"**
- **Explore and allow alternatives and choices within defined limits.**
- **Focus on process, more than products. Recognize the meaning, effort, and time your child has invested.**
- **Break tasks down into small, attainable successes. Help your child reduce immediate expectations. This is especially hard for children with vivid imaginations!**
- **Encourage a tentative career goal to instill a sense of purpose and value.**
- **Monitor yourself and eliminate criticism and sarcasm.**
- **BE a model of responsible self management.**

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Joyce VanTassel-Baska

Literature for the Young Gifted Child (Part II)

[In the last issue, I discussed criteria for selecting appropriate literature for gifted children.]

Reading aloud continues to be an important tool for young children enjoying and learning from literature. Small group discussions on the following types of questions might be held at the preschool-primary level.

- What happens in your book? Can you number the events? **(sequencing events)**
- Who is the most important person in the book? Why? Who is your favorite person in the book? Why? **(character development)**
- What new things did you learn from reading this book that you didn't know before? **(concept formation)**
- What were your favorite words or sentences in the book? Why? **(language awareness)**
- Good books make us feel as well as understand a story. What feelings did you have as you read this book? **(identification)**
- How good was this book compared to others you have read? **(evaluation)** How would you rate it in respect to:
  - *interesting story*
  - *characters I like*
  - *good ideas*
  - *where it occurred was interesting*
  - *new things to think about*

Early readers then should be encouraged to read on their own and to "think" about their book in the small group discussions. Individualizing a reading program for the gifted so that books and activities correspond to certain verbal characteristics of students is another way to approach planning a differentiated verbal curriculum for them. The use of excellent children's literature in all its diversity is important to provide a foundation for a young child's literature experience. Basal texts and even a single anthology do not offer the rich literary selections needed by the gifted from kindergarten on. Much of the best children's literature never appears in a single source. Thus, creating a multiple materials approach is crucial to implementing a rich and varied literature program.

Use of discussion-oriented inquiry techniques is also a very critical part of a successful verbal arts program for the gifted. The following example of multiple types of questions that promote inquiry is based on the children's rhyme, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star":

(Concluded on page 12)

INQUIRY TECHNIQUES

Thought Process	Questions
cognition	What is a star?
evaluation	Why do you think the author described it as "like a diamond"?
divergent thinking	What if you were a star in the sky? How would you describe what you saw on earth?
evaluation	Why do we like to look at stars?
fluency	Can you name other things we see in the sky? (Let's make a long list)
analysis	How is it that we can see stars?
elaboration	How else would you describe stars besides as "diamonds in the sky"?
divergent thinking	Pretend you are traveling from star to star. What do you notice that we can't from the earth?
inductive reasoning	Stars sometimes form patterns called constellations. Here are a few of them. What does each look like? Have you ever seen these patterns? Now you can look for them.
evaluation/analysis	What is your favorite pattern of stars? Why?
synthesis	Create your own favorite star pattern. Use color, shape, and location to convey your pattern.
flexibility	Stars are used in many ways in our world. How many different ways can you name?

HE READING ROOM

Welcome back to the reading room for the third and last (for now) discussion of fiction for young adults. Both books this time are in the hard-to-find category (both out of print, so check libraries). The first, *Pennington's Last Term*, by K.M. Peyton, shouldn't be missed by gifted teens, though it is now nearly twenty years old.

The main character, Patrick Pennington, is British, "a 196-pound hulk of a boy, with shoulders on him like a wrestler." Penn is an enigma to his parents, his teachers and even to his classmates at the secondary school to which his mother has "committed" him (Penn's word) for a fifth year. Far from an effete intellectual, he is generally termed a "thug" by the masters at the school, with the exception of the games master, who values his size and athletic prowess. Indeed, Penn drinks beer, gets into brawls, commits minor vandalism, is called "idle and destructive in class," and generally smashes normal expectations of giftedness.

In spite of his behavior, there is little doubt that this boy is gifted with an extraordinary talent for music. Whatever the failings of his lower class family (and they are many), his mother began his lessons on the piano when he was three and insisted on his keeping them up. Now that he is 17, his music teacher has written on his report, "May God forgive this boy for abusing so unusual a talent." Penn does not much value his talent, and his expectations are defined by the narrow horizons of his social class. His greatest hope is to keep himself out of reform school – no certainty.

Pennington's Last Term is a rough and funny and moving book about a rough, funny, troubled boy who, as a defense against the world's demands, is close to throwing away his unique ability. The awakening of first love, a brush with death, the acceptance not only of risk but responsibility, and finally the real discovery of himself and his gift enliven the pages of this entertaining and thought-provoking book. We sometimes need to remind ourselves that intelligence and talent may not come in a pretty package. But the problems and rewards of innate gifts must be faced wherever those gifts are found.

In contrast, my book, *The Last of Eden*, tells the story of two years in the lives of Michelle (Mike) and Marty, two girls who fit the stereotype of the economically privileged gifted student. Their Eden is Turnbull Hall, the challenging girls' boarding school they attend. Unlike Penn, Mike and Marty are each committed to developing their talents (Mike is a poet, Marty an artist), and it is this commitment that sets them apart from the other girls.

At Turnbull Hall, as in the rest of the world, differences must be accounted for, and these two face misunderstanding and outright hostility when a classmate acts out of jealousy. The story's focus is the girls' search for their own identities, the basis for (and limitations of) friendship, and the need, finally, for each to become an independent person. Since friendship may be a difficult issue for gifted young people, it is likely to be both unusually deep and unusually valued. Whatever the reason, the betrayal of that friendship brings unusual grief. ■

NEXT ISSUE: Science Fiction.

Stephanie Tolan, from Waterford, New York, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child.*

students, and the membership of each category represents considerable diversity as well.

UNDERACHIEVING SCHOOLS

In my opinion, the largest group of students in the underachieving gifted population is the one containing those who achieve significantly below their ability because of the *lack of motivation to participate and achieve academically in school* (Whitmore, 1986b). This group includes highly gifted and creative students for whom the curriculum and instruction in a standard school program fail to accommodate their specific learning styles and to provide a sense of personal satisfaction and reward derived from participation. Some of these students lack motivation in academic areas unrelated to a very narrowly focused interest in which they are highly gifted and capable of exceptional achievement. This category also includes students with emotional blocks (e.g., insecurity, fear of success or failure, depression, worry) and students for whom school achievement is not highly valued because of values transmitted by parents, peers, or the community.

> ***...we must begin by insisting that blame should not be attributed explicitly or implicitly to the child or the family, but rather the "problem" should be viewed as one of needed modifications in educational programming.***

Essentially the degree to which a gifted student is motivated to participate and achieve in school is determined by the interaction that occurs between the child's motivational set (i.e., needs, values, attitudes, interests, and specific abilities) and the two primary forces that shape his or her behavior in school:

(a) affective messages, verbal and nonverbal, that invite or disinvite the child to participate and feel a sense of belonging and reward; and

(b) the specific characteristics of the curriculum and instruction, and the degree to which they fit with the child's learning style and specific intellectual abilities.

Until 1980, the professional literature regarding gifted underachievers consistently defined the problem in terms of the child being maladjusted and academically lazy or the family dysfunctional. Specifically, patterns of underachievement were explained in terms of the student's lack of motivation, undisciplined behavior, and/or emotional immaturity or instability (Whitmore, 1980). Typical entries in the cumulative records of these students were: "This child could do classwork if he would only try; he is lazy, unmotivated, and a behavior problem."

This perspective on underachievement was found to be inaccurate and incomplete in an experimental program for primary-age underachievers in Cupertino, California, initially implemented in 1968 (Whitmore, 1980). The success of the program provided compelling evidence that the provision of an *appropriate educational program* for each child was the key factor in modifying student behavior. In other words, the student's underachieving pattern of behavior was primarily a product of interaction with a school environment that subtly disinvited participation and provided an inappropriate curriculum.

The Cupertino Project has demonstrated over the years that the most effective intervention by which to create achievement motivation in gifted underachievers is the design of an educational program responsive to the child's specific social, emotional, and intellectual needs. This approach requires appropriate guidance for the individual regarding personal characteristics that may interfere with academic achievement; however, it shifts the causal responsibility more onto the teacher and the school and less on the child or family for failing to be "appropriately responsive" to the school program.

UNDERSERVED GROUPS

The second category of underachieving gifted students is the underserved groups of individuals who often are not recognized as gifted and fail to receive the environmental nurturance of their giftedness that motivates high school achievement (Whitmore, 1987). This category includes children who are culturally different, economically disadvantaged, geographically isolated, or specific subgroups, such as females in math and science, and preschool and primary-age children. This category of students is very similar to the first in that the conditions have not nurtured their motivation to achieve in school. They are most "at-risk" for underachievement because teachers may not recognize giftedness through their language and behavior in the classroom; these students tend to withdraw and not disclose their true intellectual abilities.

Children in this category are specifically at-risk for underachievement in classrooms today because they need more opportunity to engage in language and concept acquisition, problem solving, and inquiry through exploration of many fields of knowledge. If the students are recognized as having exceptional intellectual potential, and are placed in classrooms that nurture the development of their giftedness, these children can become highly motivated scholars in school despite adverse circumstances at home or in the community (Whitmore, 1980). It is obvious that the earlier appropriate intervention occurs in school, the higher the probability of establishing *(Continued on page 8)*

patterns of high motivation and achievement in students. The principal obstacle to appropriate programming is lack of teacher opportunity to observe in class the superior cognitive abilities of gifted students and, consequently, to create an appropriate educational program. Thus, the students in this category underachieve simply because of the lack of personal awareness of their giftedness and a lack of opportunity to discover and develop it.

MASKED DISABILITIES

The third category is quite similar to the second in that it includes students who have *interfering or masking disabilities or deficits* (Whitmore, 1980; Whitmore & Maker, 1985). In this group are students who achieve below a level commensurate with their cognitive ability because of specific developmental delays, particularly in the neurological, psychomotor, and perceptual domains. Some have learning disabilities that result in poor performance involving reading or writing, but may achieve at high levels in areas such as science, social studies, and the arts.

It is obvious that the earlier appropriate intervention occurs in school, the higher the probability of establishing patterns of high motivation and achievement in students.

Students with mild to severe neurological, physical, or sensory impairment are included as well as those students with chronic poor health (e.g., diabetes, anemia, severe asthma). These disabling conditions tend to prevent the student from revealing exceptional potential in specific areas or interfere with the development of that giftedness. Students with emotional handicaps and behavior disorders also are included in this group. Some children are not recognized and appropriately served as gifted learners because of specific academic skill deficits, particularly reading and writing. If that impediment is identified, it can be corrected and patterns of high achievement can be developed.

The major obstacles to appropriate development of achievement motivation in these students is the lack of identification of their giftedness and the lack of appropriate programming. Teachers, school psychologists, and other school personnel tend to focus on the disabling condition or deficit, and prescribe educational programs to address that deficit – e.g., placement in a learning disabilities program, remedial reading, or placement in a special education class for severely impaired students.

At this time, special education teachers and school psychologists tend to focus on the disabilities and to not even explore the possibility that intellectual giftedness may exist. The gifted student in such an educational program tends to be unchallenged intellectually and prone to conform to behavioral patterns expected in such a program. The regrettable outcome is a child's sense that school is focused only on the aspects of his abilities that are inferior and impaired, and there is no sense of school bringing satisfaction through the development of superior abilities in cognitive domains. In many or most instances, the child is completely unaware of having superior cognitive abilities unless a parent or other adult has somehow nurtured the child's exploration and development of his or her gifts.

CONCLUSION

In all three categories of underachievement, those students most apt to be identified as having gifted potential or abilities are those with the most negative characteristics: i.e., lack of effort to do classwork; persistent misbehavior, either highly aggressive or severely withdrawn; low self-esteem resulting in social incompetence; negative attitude toward school and low expectations for self and school. Others who are significantly underachieving, but put forth minimal effort and produce "satisfactory" work, tend to remain unrecognized as gifted. Those students are more passive, compliant, and dependent upon nonschool activities for ego-fulfillment and the development of their giftedness.

As a result of this fact, a deviation/deficit orientation has prevailed in the identification of underachieving gifted students. This perspective has perpetuated the implicit belief that the underachievers are "the problem," thus reinforcing the pejorative connotations associated with the term "underachiever." Further, negative response to the term, "underachiever," is exacerbated by the misperception of the term, "gifted," as associated only with the elitist few who are consistently superior in all domains. There seems to be latent societal anger toward gifted children who are "lazy, undisciplined, ungrateful" underachievers!

If we accept the goal of American schools to be that of providing an appropriate education to *every* child, the focus on deficits and deviations from norms must be replaced by an emphasis on appreciating the uniqueness of individuals and tapping and developing all kinds of potentialities within each individual. Thus, thinking about underachievers must change from viewing students as deviant to:

(a) understanding educational needs and causes of student behavior, and

(b) structuring an appropriate educational program for each student.

This must be achieved in the context of full acceptance of the unique needs of gifted students; these needs do not make them of greater worth than other individuals but place them more at-risk for underachievement in school (Whitmore, 1988). The charge to all of us who seek to advocate for gifted underachievers should be to help others develop more accurate concepts of both giftedness and underachievement in order to create healthy school conditions that will foster patterns of high student achievement and may reverse patterns of severe underachievement.

To meet the charge, we must begin by insisting that blame should not be attributed explicitly or implicitly to the child or the family, but rather the "problem" should be viewed as one of needed modifications in educational programming. It can be argued that many underachievers are more accurately described as curriculum disabled or handicapped by school than as students with learning or motivational problems. To state it pointedly, gifted underachievers frequently have become underachievers as a consequence of schools failing to accommodate their educational needs. To meet those needs, we must have an accurate understanding of the meaning of giftedness, including recognition of the specific type of giftedness possessed by a child, and the process by which patterns of underachievement are learned or developed; these are prerequisites to establishing appropriate programming.

If the role schools play in the development of underachievement in gifted students is the "bad news," the "good news" is that schools can provide the solution also. Certainly it is recognized that some students present such problems behaviorally or emotionally in schools that the optimal educational program could not reverse their underachievement. More often, however, appropriate educational programs tap the natural love of learning that exists in all gifted students; these children are born with exceptional facility and motivation for learning through inquiry, examination, and exploration of their worlds.

If the role schools play in the development of underachievement in gifted students is the "bad news", the "good news" is that schools can provide the solution also.

Gifted students need to understand that they, like all individuals, have relative strengths and weaknesses. They must be helped to understand that the more multi-talented an individual is, the more difficult it is to choose where to invest the energy and time to more fully develop their talents; in other words, one cannot fully develop gifted potential in many areas without failing to reach the optimal level of achievement in all! Thus, students, as well as their teachers and parents, must become comfortable with the notion that underachievement is inevitable in all individuals with many areas of giftedness. Of greatest concern to us should be the child who is becoming emotionally and behaviorally impaired by a school program that does not allow him or her to explore and develop, with competent nurturance and guidance, the giftedness which he or she chooses to develop.

The topic of gifted underachievers is a complex one that deserves much more systematic study and research. However, that study and research is not apt to occur until accurate conceptual understandings of both giftedness and underachievement are firmly established. I hope that you will join me in attempting to move us forward in that direction.

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I would rather attempt
to do something great and fail
than attempt to do nothing
and succeed.

— R.H. Schuller —

when it came to schoolwork. It appeared to her parents and teachers that her "over-involvement" with reading and her tendency to daydream might be interfering with her academic progress. Heather was to now spend her time concentrating on school assignments exclusively. No recreational reading, no matter how advanced, would be allowed until she could "prove she could concentrate on her studies."

Heather and Tim are not unusual. There are bright children who are underachieving in the school setting, yet are involved in a wide range of interests and intellectual pursuits outside the classroom (Ziv, Rimon & Doni, 1977). The discrepancy between obvious intellectual ability and low levels of academic performance is especially frustrating because the potential of the child is highly evident. As teachers and parents, we often react to this type of situation by eliminating the underachiever's participation in the outside interest in the belief that the enthusiasm, effort, and ability exhibited by the student can and will be transferred to learning experiences in the classroom. However, this is not always the case. As Tim states, he "went 'underground' with [topics]. And I did *not* improve in school." Heather reacted in a different manner: "I made myself not want to read anymore...so it wouldn't matter."

There is no doubt that academic underachievement among the gifted is a matter of concern. Poor performance in school may mask indicators of potential, limit opportunities for appropriate educational experiences, and create poor self-concept in *any* learning situation (Bloom, 1977; Whitmore, 1980). Therefore, it is not surprising that, out of concern, we often reach to what appears to be the most evident "cause" in any given underachievement situation. However, in Tim's and Heather's case, the "cause" – the student's personal interests – may actually be a key to **improving** academic performance in school.

Student interests and out-of-school activities have been perceived as crucial to later academic success by gifted underachievers like Tim and Heather who have been able to reverse the underachievement pattern (Emerick, 1988). The information these students have shared regarding the reversal process suggests there are a number of reasons why we must take another, more positive look at a child's interest area and at the role this factor may play in helping the gifted underachiever.

> ***...perpetuation of some area of interest during the period of academic difficulty provides a way to maintain a love of learning and to avoid falling into underachievement patterns in all areas.***

1. The presence of an interest area, even one not related to the classroom setting, indicates the presence of a desire to learn.

Grades and assignments are not the only concern in the underachievement pattern. A greater problem is what Paul Torrance (1965) has labeled as the loss of the "will to learn" in any situation. Gifted underachievers who have reversed the pattern indicate that the perpetuation of some area of interest during the period of academic difficulty provides a way to maintain a love of learning and to avoid falling into underachievement patterns in all areas. Tim maintained that keeping his desire to learn alive, even "underground," enabled him "to kick back into school learning" at a later date. He felt his ability to gain intellectual satisfaction from his own interests allowed him to gain a balance between his out-of-school activities and his schoolwork. He never lost his basic love of learning or his curiosity.

For teachers and parents, the presence of an out-of-school interest provides evidence of an underachiever's "will-to-learn." With careful guidance, the desire to learn can be expanded to include other areas and settings.

2. Out-of-school interests and activities are indicators of the underachiever's strengths and potential.

When a bright child is experiencing academic failure, it is easy to forget that he or she is gifted as well as underachieving. The presence of a strong interest area enables the teacher and parent to view the underachiever as more than a problem and to provide positive support during underachievement. Tim's interest in whales indicated a variety of abilities: task commitment, independence, above-average intellectual ability, self-confidence in dealing with adults, and awareness of environmental issues. Once recognized, his parents and teachers agreed these characteristics were to be encouraged, not eliminated. Tim now believes that the ability to identify and praise his strengths helped him apply these same characteristics to academic endeavors. Underachievement can easily mask indicators of potential; the student's interests, and the degree to which he or she pursues them, can provide important clues regarding ability levels and characteristics related to gifted behavior.

3. The student's interests and out-of-school activities can improve feelings of self-worth.

Academic underachievement is not a pleasant situation and students who are underachieving frequently lose confidence in their ability to cope with the experience. According to Lawrence Greene (1986), "Achievement and a sense of self-worth are inextricably *(Continued on page 11)*

linked...the child who respects himself, who actualizes himself, and derives pride from his accomplishments is blessed." Involvement in an interest area provides the opportunity for the underachiever to demonstrate gifted behavior and to maintain feelings of self-worth. As one former underachiever stated, "[the interest area] was the only way I *knew* I wasn't dumb and a total failure...**it was one thing I knew I could do well.** If I could work on [the interest area] far enough, I could achieve...".

An underachiever's interest area may indeed interfere or come in conflict with academic success in school. However, the elimination of an area of success, whether out-of-school or in school, may have a negative impact on the student's perceived capacity for achievement in other areas.

4. A student's interests may provide important information regarding appropriate learning experiences in the classroom.

It was clear to Heather's parents and teacher that she was a bright student capable of above-average academic achievement. However, what was not initially evident was how her out-of-school interest in reading could provide information regarding her lack of success in school. When Heather's grades failed to improve, her teacher took a closer look at Heather's interests and reading activities. It became clear that (a) Heather was finishing assignments quickly and was not being provided with challenging activities beyond the basic assignments; and (b) she was capable of higher levels of thinking and a greater degree of independence than were being offered in the classroom. Adjustments were made to accelerate Heather's basic curriculum, eliminating material she already knew, and offering her more appropriate, advanced activities. In addition, Heather was allowed to select and create several learning experiences for herself. By recognizing the characteristics of the independent learner, the teacher was able to make adjustments in the curriculum that allowed Heather to begin the reversal process.

The gifted underachiever's interests can tell us a great deal about his or her preferred mode of learning (i.e. visual, auditory, kinesthetic), willingness to learn, areas of aptitude, skills as an independent learner, and style of learning. In turn, this information can help us identify a possible mismatch between the learner and the learning experiences offered in the classroom. We can then ensure that the underachiever's academic difficulties are not being exacerbated by inappropriate curriculum and instruction.

5. The student's interest area can make in-school learning experiences meaningful for the gifted underachiever.

Heather's strong interest in reading, combined with a fascination for people and their feelings, proved to be influential in her future academic success in school. While adjustments in her in-school curriculum began to have a positive impact on her achievement, it was not until she experienced an English literature class that "school became meaningful." She found herself sincerely interested for the first time "because it was a lot of reading and I like to read. And most of the stories had to do with people, and why they do the things they do!" She enjoyed discussing the characters and their motivations. She was surprised to discover she was succeeding academically in the course and that her personal interests were the key to her success.

The gifted underachiever's interests can tell us a great deal about his or her preferred mode of learning...

For Tim, the skills taught in school began to be relevant to his investigation of various topics. One of his teachers took time to point out how certain activities in language arts could help him improve the books he wanted to write. He was surprised to discover that "any subject, from English to Science to History can all be related to somebody's interest. You can learn everything normally taught...in school following your own interest."

Understanding and appreciating the gifted underachiever's areas of personal interest can help the teacher and parent forge a connection between these areas and in-school learning experiences. This connection leads to the classroom becoming a relevant, meaningful place for the gifted underachiever.

There are no easy answers or simple responses to the underachievement issue, especially in the case of the gifted child. We must be willing to look beyond a child's poor performance in school to recognize those instances when the bright underachiever is exhibiting gifted behavior. The student who is writing and illustrating a book on whales, building a laboratory in the basement, or teaching herself calculus in the sixth grade from high school textbooks is a capable learner in spite of in-school evidence.

A key to reversing the underachievement pattern for students like Heather and Tim is to encourage the development of the characteristics of the independent learner both in and out of the classroom. This means helping the child learn to maintain a careful balance between personal interests and academic learning experiences in school. This balance can be achieved through the management of time allocated to the interest area rather than the complete elimination of the out-of-school activity. For example, Tim's parents suggested that he think of himself as having two careers – independent investigator and student. If one of the "careers" was not faring well, he and his parents *(Continued on page 12)*

STUDENT INTERESTS Continued from page 11

would make decisions to reschedule the amount of time spent on a particular activity. When he fell behind in math, he spent less time on whales and on writing his book. However, he was always allowed some time to devote to his current interest.

Tim's father states that it took some time for the strategy to begin to be effective, but Tim was pleased with the results. He felt he was able to reverse the underachievement pattern because of the positive attitude his parents and teachers had regarding his abilities and interests. ■

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INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES *(Continued from page 5)*

Good book lists should be available to the gifted at all ages and teachers should actively encourage students to read particular selections. Examples of exemplary books for young gifted children (preschool-primary level) include:

- ☐ Barbara Cooney's, ***Miss Rumphius***
- ☐ Arnold Lobel's, ***The Rose in My Garden***
- ☐ Verna Aardema's, ***Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain*** (others by this author are also appropriate)
- ☐ Eric Carle's, ***The Very Hungry Caterpillar***
- ☐ Mercer Mayer's, ***There's a Nightmare in My Closet***
- ☐ Margaret Wise's, ***The Runaway Bunny***
- ☐ Maurice Sendak's, ***Where the Wild Things Are***
- ☐ Esphyr Slobodkina, ***Caps for Sale***
- ☐ Arlene Mosel, ***Tikitiki Tembo***
- ☐ Robert McClosky's, ***Make Way for Ducklings, Anno's Journey***
- ☐ William Steig's, ***Doctor DeSoto, Sylvester and the Magic Pebble***
- ☐ Franklyn Branley's, ***Flash, Crash, Rumble, and Roll*** (other science books also available), ***Babar series***
- ☐ H. A. Rey, ***Curious George series***
- ☐ Stan & Jan Berenstein, ***Berenstein Bears series***
- ☐ Peggy Parish, ***Amelia Bedelia series***

In conclusion, it is important for parents and teachers alike to provide the young gifted child with the world of literature as a tool to experiencing the world. It is also important that they recognize this world can be unlocked for children without their mastering the basic skills of reading and can enhance such mastery when it occurs. Furthermore, the literature experience can provide a context for early writing encounters that facilitate ideational fluency and visualization. It is hoped that literature—*not* reading skills—is considered fundamental to reading progress for young gifted children. ■

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ADVANCED DEVELOPMENT JOURNAL: *A Journal on Adult Giftedness*

Gifted children usually have gifted parents. If you are wondering about your own giftedness, subscribe to **Advanced Development:** ***A Journal on Adult Giftedness.*** No other journal focuses specifically on gifted adults. Unlike the traditional view of adult giftedness as high levels of productivity and creativity, advanced development in adults is defined as the deepening of the personality and strengthening of human values such as empathy, concern for others, responsibility and integrity.

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Kathi Kearney

HE HIGHLY GIFTED

The Early College Option (Part IV)

The decision to attend college early is often fraught with unexpected considerations. In past columns, we met several young college students and explored the academic and social/emotional issues that sometimes arise. This final column in the early college series reviews the legal and family development issues facing early college entrants.

LEGAL, LEGISLATIVE, AND INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Inform yourself about the requirements of compulsory school attendance laws. In some states, the young student who leaves junior high or high school to attend college full-time may technically be considered truant unless special permission is obtained. "Homeschooling" or "equivalent instruction" applications may need to be filed. Check with the gifted and talented consultant in your State Department of Education for more information.

If you will need financial aid, seek private as well as government sources. It has been difficult for some young college students to obtain federal financial aid if they do not have a high school diploma or a General Educational Development Certificate (GED), due to changing federal rules. A few young college students have had some success with the federal bureaucracy by contacting their senator's regional office staff. However, if private sources of financial aid or scholarships are available, it would be wise to also investigate these.

Find out how old you must be to take the GED test. In many states, you must be at least 17. In some colleges, financial aid or full admission status depends upon having either a high school diploma or a GED. Then the young, highly gifted student can be caught in a difficult predicament. Intelligent enough to score very high on the much more difficult Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and in a situation where high school work is academically inappropriate, she may be prevented from taking the GED because of her chronological age and state laws. (This is particularly discriminatory to disadvantaged highly gifted students whose families do not have the money to pay for college coursework themselves, and who do not have the social and political connections in the private college arena.)

FAMILY ISSUES

Be prepared to face the unexpected financial costs of early college attendance. For parents of the highly gifted, the extra financial costs "...start sooner, last longer, and mount higher than they do with less gifted children" (Silverman & Kearney, 1989, p.50). Even if the student receives some form of financial aid, the unexpected timing of early college attendance can throw off the family's timing of college savings plans as well. Families need to weigh carefully the decision about the benefits of early college attendance (part-time or full-time) against financial realities, and be flexible and creative in their solutions.

Be aware of the phenomenon of the "early empty nest" and prepare emotionally as a family for this possibility. Any kind of acceleration has the inherent possibility of also accelerating the day when the child will leave home, and early college attendance is particularly susceptible to "early empty nest syndrome." Sometimes it feels to parents and children alike as if years of schooling "evaporated" quite unexpectedly and sometimes unintentionally. Then, early college attendance can mean feeling cheated out of a year or more of parenting (Silverman & Kearney, 1989). It can also mean dealing with separation issues as an entire family. When Nicole went away to college at age 16, her little brother asked if she had died! When a family is sure that acceleration via early college attendance is the right decision, they can prepare emotionally as a family, as well as individually. It is important to remember that separation issues are normal in adolescence. For families of the highly gifted, what may be a bit out of sync – just like the child's own discrepancies in development – is only the timing.

The early college option is a positive one for many highly gifted students. When accompanied by academic readiness, strong motivation, support systems, and attention to the unique issues of family and individual development that become part of the accelerative experience,

> ...Carefully chosen and well supported early entrants are more likely to complete baccalaureate degrees than other academically talented youths, and they earn higher grades and more academic honors while so doing (Janos & Robinson, *et.al.*, 1988, p. 210). ■

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ERSONALITY PLUS

On Overachievement

"Overachiever" is a term bandied about as frequently as "underachiever," but, frankly, I have always had difficulty comprehending what it means. Typical definitions of underachievement involve a **discrepancy** between some estimate of an individual's capabilities and a measure of his or her performance. It makes sense to me that you can be more competent than you demonstrate at any particular time. For example, you can study for a test and then get asked questions unrelated to the material you studied. Under these circumstances, your performance would be considerably lower than your competence, no matter how well you knew the material. IQ tests are another good example. You are always smarter than your test score, because there is no IQ test that can measure your full capacity.

But how is it possible for your performance to outdistance your competence?? The chances of your "guessing correctly" on a test when you have absolutely no idea what you are doing are infinitesimal. It is ludicrous to convince yourself, "I'm not really smart...I'm just a good test taker." There are bad test-takers, just like there are underachievers. But no one is just a "good test taker."

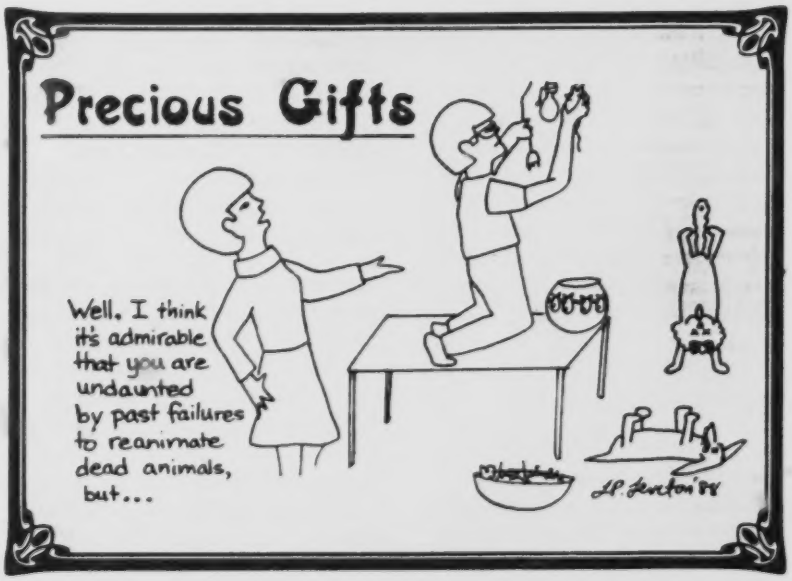
The concept of "overachievement" needs to be examined more carefully to see what it really implies. Over the years, I have asked many groups of people if they consider themselves "achievers," "underachievers," or "overachievers," and why they identify with the label they select. Those who identify themselves as "overachievers" usually say things like: "I work too hard," "I do more than is necessary," "I'm driven," etc.. I often reply, "Then you think of Marie Curie and Sergei Rachmaninoff as overachievers too? Those phrases certainly apply to them as well!"

I find it fascinating that the majority of men in these groups see themselves as "underachievers," while the majority of women see themselves as "overachievers." I ask groups to think about the students they label in their minds as "underachievers" and "overachievers." Again, a sex bias reveals itself on a regular basis. Boys underachieve, whereas girls overachieve. Boys are capable of much better work, but girls compensate for their lack of talent by turning in extra-credit projects and by studying harder.

To some extent, we are all underachievers, because there isn't enough time or energy to accomplish all that we are capable of doing. But I would like to propose that we ban the term "overachiever" as a nonsensical, nonword that has no legitimate meaning. It is another pejorative – another put down, like "overly sensitive," "too intense," and "too perfectionistic" – that is used against the gifted, and, in addition, it is sex-biased.

There should be a club, like "Overachievers Anonymous," that women can contact whenever we begin to think of ourselves as "overachievers" instead of as truly talented. And we need to bite our tongues before we apply that term to one more young girl, giving her the impression that she only got that A because she "works hard," not because she is really intelligent. We don't want to give children the impression that anyone who is really gifted shouldn't have to work hard – that only "overachievers" work hard. Yet, perhaps that is exactly what we convey by continuing to use that term. Hard work leads to achievement, not to "overachievement." ■

Linda Silverman, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist and Director of the Gifted Child Development Center in Denver, Colorado.



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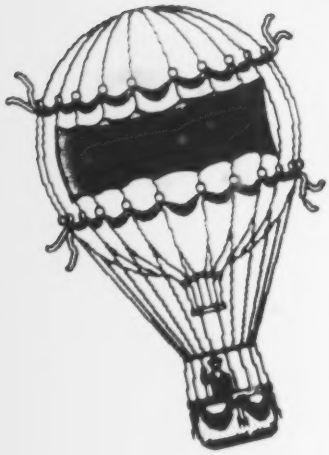

Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack
Tour Guide

CREATIVE WRITING

This journey wends its way through holidays that occur during the school year, from September's Labor Day celebration to May's more reflective Memorial Day. The focus of the journey is the language arts, specifically, creative writing, and the only travel equipment needed is a pencil and an imagination ready to explore.

Imagine what might happen if all the inanimate objects in a school were to come to life and form a labor organization: The United Mind Workers' Affiliates. Who might their spokesperson be? **Write a labor day oration that the classroom computer, pencil sharpener, or waste paper basket might deliver on Labor Day.**

October is a frightful season for pumpkins. First, people come along and carve them up, and then Halloween ruffians steal them off porches and smash them in the streets. **Write an obituary for a prominent pumpkin who has been vilely treated.**

November is the month the turkeys hate, and with good reason! But now there is Super Turkey! **Create a cartoon strip or a funny story about the exploits of Super Turkey as she comes to the rescue of distressed turkeys everywhere.**

One of the best known Christmas songs is "The Twelve Days of Christmas." **Write a new version of the song for the year 2089.** What gifts might a suitor present for the 12 days of Christmas or the 8 days of Chanukah a century from now?

In January, write New Year's Resolutions. Take a fresh look at the world. **Write a list of things to do in 1990 that will require real creativity and ingenuity on your part.**

February is the time for Valentines. Engage in a little research about some of the famous duos down through history: Romeo & Juliet, Marx & Lenin, Antony & Cleopatra, and the Wright brothers. **Write two letters that the chosen twosome might have penned to one another.**

Beware the Ides of March! **Plan and write an original murder mystery in which the soothsayer's admonition should have been heeded.**

Redesign the Easter Bunny. Think of all the attributes or parts of a rabbit: nose, whiskers, ears, tail, etc. Now create a new kind of bunny by changing all these parts. Maybe the Easter Bunny should have a wagging tail rather than a powder puff. Once the new bunny is created, **develop an advertising campaign to introduce the new bunny to the world.**

To complete the year, **write a thoughtful poem or an essay that is a memorial tribute.** Memorials do not just have to be about people. Recall a special pet that you loved alot. Or, perhaps **write a sad farewell to a lost ideal or a broken friendship.**

Farewell travelers, until next time. I hope this journey has not left you in too much of a *holidaze.* ■

Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Gifted Education at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and editor of *G/T News.*

Martha Morelock

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS: The Young Gifted Child

Conceptual Precocity And Emotional Maturity

Gifted children have been described as an amalgam of many developmental levels (Tolan, 1989). Adults may find it difficult in dealing with these children whose intellectual comprehension of complex situations generally outstrips their emotional resources for dealing with them. Additionally, their heightened conceptual abilities can place increased emotional demands on gifted children – perhaps taxing them to the extent that they may appear less "emotionally mature" than their agemates.

An example is three-year-old Jeremy, who became visibly upset one morning when his mother's car refused to start, thereby preventing them from leaving on a planned outing. Jeremy's mother's attempt to reassure him that a quick call to the local garage would summon help to start the car fell on deaf ears. "But what if *their* car breaks down?" Jeremy tearfully persisted.

Or, consider four-year-old Matthew, who demonstrated fear of using the subway with his parents (or with anyone else). It took the form of a concern about getting lost in the city and never being able to find one's way home.

At first glance, both Jeremy and Matthew may seem extraordinarily fearful – perhaps even deeply insecure. Both children, however, are highly gifted. Unlike most children their age, they are keenly capable of conceptualizing contingent possibilities and fretting over them. Both children recognize that there are situations beyond parental control. Jeremy foresees that if one car breaks down, then so can another; and he further recognizes that his mother is powerless to guarantee that this will not happen. Matthew, on the other hand, finds simply getting on a subway car to an unclearly defined destination disturbing. His advanced intellectual abilities require some clearly delineated cognitive framework in order for him to feel secure.

In working with children like Jeremy and Matthew, adults need to meet their needs at multiple developmental levels. Jeremy finally calmed down when his mother explained that if the garage's car broke down, they would call a taxi – and, if necessary, a *second* taxi – but that they would *not* be forever stranded at home. They had numerous options for help at hand. Matthew's fears of the subway subsided when his parents purchased a map of the subway system and took it with them on their trips into the city so that Matthew could conceptualize where he was within the city at any given point in time. At the same time, both children benefited from reassuring hugs and a gentle, understanding approach to their basic distress – as is true of all three- and four-year-olds.

The mixture of advanced conceptual ability and age-appropriate emotional maturity frequently found in gifted children is eloquently captured in a story recounted by child psychiatrist Rima Laibow (Feldman, 1986). It is one worth telling as a concluding statement:

An extremely gifted four-year-old boy was being interviewed by a psychology professor to determine whether the child would be permitted to use university resources. During the interview, the psychologist asked the boy about the stuffed cat which the child clutched tightly under his arm. The boy replied that it was Fluffy the cat, his "transitional object." When the psychologist asked what he meant by that, the child went on to explain, using accurate psychological terminology, the purpose and function of transitional objects. He concluded his discourse by noting "I like to carry it with me. It makes me feel good." ■

Special note to Readers: If you have encountered a puzzling situation with a young gifted child which you would like discussed in this newsletter, please write to me, describing the situation and the questions it provoked. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of children and families in stories used in my columns. Write to:

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Thomas M. Buescher

ADOLESCENT PASSAGES

The Challenges of New Relationships Part III

[In previous columns we explored some of the complications talented adolescents face when they begin to separate from their families. Parents and adolescents often re-experience some earlier stresses as they struggle to remain connected while permitting each other to explore separate lives.]

The complications posed by separation and individuation for talented adolescents bring home a common truth: all growth is accompanied by change, tension, and conflict both within and outside young people and their families. While issues of individuation inside the family might produce measurable pain for parents, these are not the only pressures talented adolescents feel. Complications in relationships with classmates and close friends can be equally serious. They can further strain the newfound sense of ownership for special talents.

Relationships and Growth

One reason for ambivalent early relationships with adolescent peers is the competition between the desire to be noticed and accepted and the fear of feeling different or estranged. The wish to remain different but accepted is simply another nuance in the process of becoming 'separate but connected.'

Most talented adolescents handle these demands on their loyalties well, but they are not inoculated against the common experiences of peer pressure. Like their peers, talented adolescents both create and respond to social pressure. They seek some sense of power amid feelings of being controlled and powerless in the peer group. To cope, they might resort to unacceptable social behavior or risky attempts to garner peer admiration by overt acting out at home or school. Drug and alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, and property destruction are probably as familiar grounds for some gifted adolescents as for their less talented peers. Still others might simply abandon their own recognized talents as an angry way to exert power against parents or themselves. "I'm in control here – I can make this talent my own or drop it whenever I want." This kind of denial as a way to control others leads to frustration, fueling later depression and dissatisfaction.

Good Defenses

Scott, a fourteen-year-old musician and math whiz, complains that his buddies are too distant, too preoccupied with attracting and keeping girlfriends in eighth grade, and are subsequently useless as friends to him. "I may as well not even bother calling anyone tonight. They wouldn't be interested in going to the movies with ME!" What caused this wall of defense? Angry and withdrawn at times, Scott chides his parents. When they press him for some explanation about his attitude, he denies anything serious is amiss but confides that, "*thanks to them*," he lacks any confidence to approach peers to be involved with him. "They should have raised me better for problems like this" becomes his barricade against responsibility.

Not all adolescent defenses work this way. Some actually help to build relationships. Anna Freud (1966) suggested that 'intellectualization' so effectively controlled adolescents' fears about losing control of their biological urges after puberty that it enhanced group bonding. Among some of the talented adolescents I have known, defenses were effectively adapted to the ongoing, rigorous process of talent development that demands discipline, cooperation, adherence to tough priorities, and frequent postponing of gratification. "I can't go out tonight. My final draft for the AP history class essay is due tomorrow. I'm going to be up all night. Sorry, maybe Saturday."

New Challenges

The greatest challenge in any relationship is deciding how much a companion will get to know about one's life and feelings. Juggling questions of openness and privacy successfully takes skill and experience that talented adolescents lack as they embark on new relationships. When they fail, it hurts their pride and esteem. Yet because they are adaptive, somewhat insightful, and verbally fluent, most interpersonal gaffs and crises are successfully skirted or resolved. Nevertheless, bright adolescents worry about intimate relationships where they must surrender some degree of control.

Relationships beyond the family challenge talented adolescents on many fronts. Parents, teachers, and family members can be most helpful by not reinforcing a young person's belief that every aspect of life he or she touches must be flawlessly concluded. Securing companionship and intimacy beyond the family demands time, sensitivity, and confidence. ■

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ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

In the movie "Dead Poets Society," Robin Williams portrays a late 50's teacher, John Keating, who believes that the purpose of education is to facilitate young people in thinking for themselves. He was before his time in espousing idealistic educational theories, and his colleagues took issue with him.

The movie left me, as an educator, with a feeling of vacillation. I didn't know whether to be ashamed or proud – ashamed because, 30 years later, some educators are still guided by 1950's values; or proud that we have indeed come a long way in education since that inflexible period.

My undergraduate teacher training took place in the same era as the movie. As education reluctantly moved into the liberal 60's, the catchwords became "individual differences." The phrase become indelibly etched on my brain. As I, much like Keating, struggled to apply this new concept of individualization to students in my first classroom, I encountered a strong resistance from the entrenched traditional value system.

Keating tore out textbook pages so that students could think for themselves. I, too, cut up workbooks to cater to different ways of learning, to teach my young students to think and to question. As in the movie, such radical approaches were not rewarded. I was a renegade and eventually left the classroom in pursuit of more effective ways to meet individual needs.

We may think that we have traveled far from the inflexibility of that pre-60's period to one that encourages creativity, promotes critical thinking, and values individualization. And that brings me back to my dilemma: Should we take pride in having left the lock-step, conformist approach to education behind us in the history of the years? Or should we feel concern that we have not come all that far from narrowness of thought, emphasis on the "right" answer, and acceptance of ideas without questioning them.

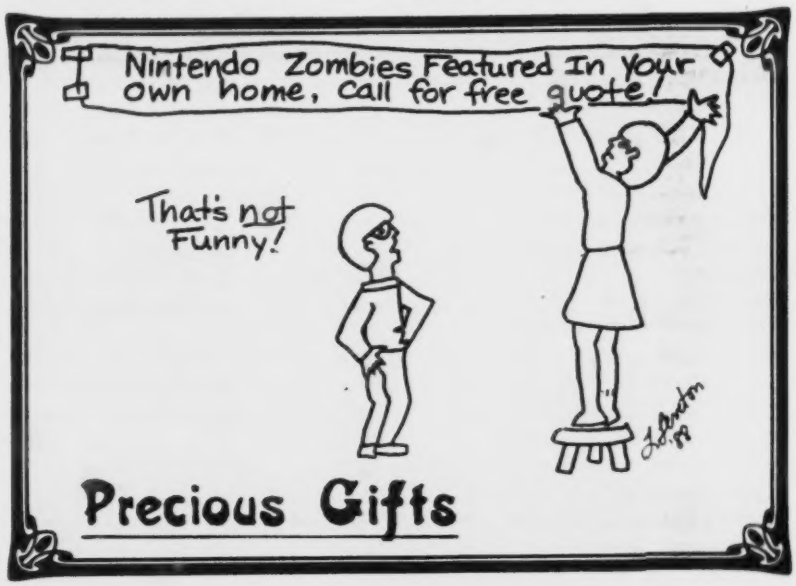
The implications for gifted education are numerous. We must feel pride when our students become free and creative thinkers. We must equip our brightest minds with the ability to make decisions that will impact favorably on their future and that of humanity.

We must ensure that the phrase "individual differences" is not a cliche and that the concept of individualization is more than lip service. Gifted education must be an integral and immediate part of that process. Like Keating, educators of gifted students must resist conformity, dare to use unorthodox methods and move education beyond the confines of the classroom.

Recently I participated in a special education staffing for a highly gifted seventh grader who was achieving far below his potential. I was apprehensive that the conference would pigeon-hole the young man into a structured approach to learning that might turn him off to education forever. However, the participants proved to be receptive to utilizing alternative curriculum methods to cater to the student's unique learning style. The results of the staffing were encouraging for gifted education.

Individual differences do exist. We must accept them, teach to them, encourage them. Our journey is not over, but we have come a long, long way in three decades. ■

Dorothy Knopper is State Consultant on the Gifted, Colorado Department of Education and "Open Space" columnist for *Roeper Review*.



Linda Sinclair

from parent to parent

"We feel that the most important thing we can do as parents is to come to terms with our ten-year-old son's abilities, because when a parent fails to internalize the impact and the 'okness' of being gifted, the child is not affirmed, and all children have the basic need to be affirmed," said Arlie Willems of Anamosa, Iowa. Arlie, and her husband, Jay, are at that precarious stage that many parents of gifted children go through, when they are struggling to "own" their child's giftedness and understand the impact it will have on their perceptions and expectations as parents.

"We are still at a difficult point in terms of accepting Nate's ability level and determining how best to deal with it," said Arlie. "I think for most parents, even though it is exciting to find out their child is gifted, it also takes some time to learn to accept the childs' giftedness. We feel as if we are riding an emotional roller coaster, because we have received conflicting scores from various instruments. The degree of Nate's abilities is only important to us because we feel as parents we have to act as his advocates to see that he receives the best education possible. We believe the degree of modification in his program depends in large part on his degree of giftedness."

"We knew Nate was bright from early on, but because of the conflicting scores he received on the WISC-R, the Slossen, and the Stanford-Binet (4th ed.), we had settled into the idea that he was mildly gifted. Then Linda (Silverman) suggested we have him retested with the Stanford Binet (L-M), and when we heard the results we were really thrown for a loop. I guess it was easier to think he was not highly gifted. Now we must seek alternatives outside our school district."

"We have some concerns about Nate's school performance. His work is satisfactory for his grade level, but his skills are not at a level commensurate with his tested abilities. Nate's Iowa Test of Basic Skills were not as high as we or his teachers had anticipated. This was a concern for us."

"As a parent, I feel that Nate is an underachiever. When he is in class, at times it is almost like he is in a dormant state. Also, he doesn't always pay attention, because he doesn't really have to – a lot of what he hears is review and he assimilates information easily. Fortunately, he has an excellent teacher who doesn't require him to repeat material unnecessarily, but with an entire classroom of students, she can't offer him a totally different program. Right now, we are trying to find out why he is not achieving as he could and working to find ways we can help him, without pressuring him."

"At this point in time, we have not had our two younger children tested, because they have not exhibited the same characteristics that Nate did. We are very aware, though, that the siblings of an identified gifted child are often gifted as well, so we are keeping an eye on their development. We know that during this 'acceptance' stage, it is even more important that we not become so totally focused on Nate and his needs that we lose sight of the special qualities and gifts his siblings have to offer." ■

Linda Sinclair is a freelance writer from Denver, Colorado and parent of a highly gifted child.

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National Survey of Gifted Hearing-Impaired Children

S.E.N.G at Wright State University has been awarded a grant to conduct a national survey of gifted, hearing-impaired children. This survey will focus on the emotional needs of these children. Parents who would like to support the research by completing the survey about their child can write Dr. Robert Basil, S.E.N.G., P.O. Box 2745, Dayton, Ohio, 45401, (513) 461-1687. All information reported for the research will be held strictly confidential. At the completion of the research, a copy of the group results will be sent to those participating.

4th National Creative Inventive Thinking Skills Conference

October 26th-28th, Portland, Oregon

Registration information: OATAG
Box 1703
Beaverton, OR 97075

The Legacy of Leta Hollingworth: Her Contributions to Psychology and Gifted Education

A national conference is being planned in commemoration of the golden anniversary of Leta Stetter Hollingworth at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, October 19th-21st, 1989. There will be strands for psychologists, gifted educators, and parents. Keynote addresses by Dr. Abraham Tannenbaum, Dr. Barbara Kerr, Dr. Julian Stanley, Dr. Linda Silverman. For information contact, Dr. Norma S. Griffin, Coordinator, Gifted Education, 202 MLH, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68588-0229, or call (402) 472-1701.

FOCUS:

GIFTED GIRLS

THE EMOTIONAL FOUNDATION OF GIFTED GIRLS
Dr. Christine Garrison

GIFTED GIRLS: Parental Communication And Perceived Competence
Dr. Carolyn Callahan, and Dewey G. Cornell

Undertake something that is difficult; it will do you good. Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow.

— Ronald E. Osborn —

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November - December, 1989

Volume 2, Issue 2

The Emotional Foundation Of Gifted Girls

Christine N. Garrison, Ed.D.

What should parents and teachers know to provide an appropriate environment in which gifted girls can flourish? Everyone who is involved with a gifted girl needs to understand her special characteristics, her uniqueness. In my work with gifted adolescent girls, I have learned that it is of critical importance to a gifted girl that there be significant individuals and support systems in her life who undertand her emotional development and support her personal growth.

Emotional intensity often manifests itself early in life. One parent described how her highly gifted daughter, as an infant, would get enraged about something and would begin to work herself into a frenzy. In order to calm her, this mother learned to hold her daughter for a length of time with the purpose of absorbing as much of the extreme emotion as possible. She said that right from the beginning she knew that her child was highly emotional and would need to learn ways in which to deal with that high energy.

In order to aid the healthy growth and *(Continued on page 10)*

FOCUS ON:

GIFTED GIRLS

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The Hidden Gifted Learner
Suzanne Perry 3

Parenting the Gifted
Elizabeth Meckstroth 4

Instructional Strategies
Joyce VanTassel-Baska 5

The Reading Room
Stephanie Tolan 6

The Highly Gifted
Kathi Kearney 15

Creative Ventures and Encounters
Jerry Flack 16

Adolescent Passages
Thomas Bucacher 17

Current Developments in Gifted Education
Dorothy Knepper 18

From Parent to Parents
Linda Sinclair 19

Gifted Girls' Self-Concept and Their Communication With Parents

Carolyn M. Callahan, Ph.D.
Dewey G. Cornell, Ph.D.

At the University of Virginia, we investigated the relationship between self-concept and parent communication in a group of gifted adolescent girls. [*See Note 1*] We were particularly interested in the degree to which good communication was associated with positive self-concept and the contrast (if any) between the girl's relationship with her father and mother. In this article we shall describe the research on the self-concept of gifted students, the importance of self-concept in talented women, our study, and the link between self-concept and parental communication. We conclude the article with guidance to parents on how to enhance communication with their teenage daughters.

Previous Studies

Studies of gifted students generally show their excellent overall adjustment and positive self-concepts. While such group findings are heartening, we still need to examine the adjustment problems which may occur among some (*Continued on page 12*)

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Friends,

This issue is about gifted girls, a topic of great concern to many of us. Giftedness in girls is at risk. Although we have no difficulty finding equal numbers of gifted boys and girls for preschool and primary programs, by junior high school two-thirds of the students identified for gifted programs are male and one-third female. A substantial number of gifted girls get lost along the way.

Some writers today say we should expect more boys than girls to be placed in gifted programs, that there are at least twice as many gifted boys as gifted girls, based upon the groups used to establish norms for most standardized tests. However, we have had research since Terman's work in 1916 that indicates that the sexes are equal in intelligence, even at the upper ranges. In fact, more girls than boys were found to score above 190 in several historical and current studies.

Therefore, we have to look elsewhere for an explanation of what happens to giftedness in girls. In the past ten years of assessing gifted children, I have found that girls usually will demonstrate their abilities on an IQ test if we test them before the age of eight. At eight or nine, they bat their pretty eyelashes, and say "I don't know" a lot. They have either learned well how to hide their abilities or they become so terrified of being wrong that they won't risk making a mistake. This does not allow us to see the true range of abilities of girls in the classroom, on tests, or in the normative samples mentioned above. If we just assume that there are more gifted boys than gifted girls in the population, we will fail to locate the factors that prevent gifted girls from disclosing their abilities.

Giftedness that is suppressed does not have the opportunity to flower in adulthood. But through our own awareness, we can change this picture so that gifted girls have the support they need to acknowledge their talents and work at developing them for themselves and for society.

In this issue, you will learn about the differences in developmental patterns in gifted girls and boys, the emotional development of gifted girls, and the relationship between gifted girls' self-concept and communication with parents. Each article provides *concrete suggestions* for helping gifted girls to understand their abilities and lead more fulfilling lives.

Linda Silverman

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Suzanne M. Perry

HE HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

The Young Gifted Child (Part I)

The woman on the other end of the line cleared her throat nervously. "Um, I'm calling about my four year old, Zachary. I've been told he's very bright. I'm sure all mothers think that about their children, of course," she continued apologetically, "but we have had Zack assessed at the University and they tell me that he can be considered, er, gifted. I was just calling to find out what the school can do or what we should be doing at home. Zack is our first child so we don't have any real basis to compare what he does with what other kids his age do. He does remember things well, like little poems or things that happened a long time ago, and he uses some pretty big words. When he taught himself to read a few months ago we felt like he had something on the ball, but gifted! To tell you the truth we're feeling a little frantic about all this."

Coordinators of gifted programs, elementary principals and gifted educators all over the country receive calls like this frequently. Parent concerns that surface in the course of the conversation include:

My child isn't really gifted.

Parents raising their first child often have little basis for comparison regarding gifted behaviors and assume that all children have the advanced capabilities that their child displays. The persistence, curiosity, high energy level and advanced verbal skills demonstrated by many young gifted children may be perceived by some parents or preschool teachers as negative or problem behaviors rather than as evidence of giftedness. Either situation yields a gifted child who is hidden from immediate recognition.

It takes Wonder-Parent to adequately meet the needs of a young gifted child.

Often parents feel both confident and competent about their parenting skills until they are told their child is gifted. Then, for some, it's as if a huge load dropped out of the heavens and landed squarely on their shoulders. They begin to question whether the parenting strategies that they use are nurturing enough, whether the experiences that they provide are enriching enough, the toys stimulating enough, the preschool accelerated enough. It takes parents awhile, after absorbing the news, to realize that the best parenting that they can provide for their (surprise) gifted child is a combination of what they are already doing and a few home modifications and extensions.

Gifted little children are baby Einsteins.

Another factor that tends to shade a parent's reaction to learning that their little girl or boy is gifted is the parent's own mental picture of the "gifted child." This brain snapshot might consist of a kid with bottle-bottom eyeglasses, a briefcase stocked with encyclopedias and pants three inches too short, or possibly a mad scientist or a raving genius type. It takes weeks or months after first hearing the gifted label for parents to realize that no drastic, dreadful metamorphosis is imminent.

It's bad manners to talk about your child's gifts.

Finally, after the parents themselves have accepted the reality of their child's giftedness, there's the matter of telling other people. Regardless of whether the parents had suspected their child's talents all along and are happy to have them confirmed or whether the information came as a complete surprise, for most people it is inherently awkward to talk about "My Gifted Child." There is the fear of seeming to brag, the fear that all parents think that their own child is gifted but politely refrain from talking about it or the fear that this magic ability might one day up and disappear. In fact, since parents are the major advocates in the lives of young gifted children, parents do need to share their child's strengths and talents with those in or out of school who are attempting to meet the child's needs.

What will the future hold for Zack, the gifted child who was hidden until just a few weeks ago? Is early enrollment in school the only answer? On the contrary, parents are all children's first teachers. In the next issue, home activities for the young gifted child will be explored in detail. ■

Suzanne Perry, Ph.D., is Instructional Resource for Project Think in the Aurora Public Schools in Colorado, and author of the children's book, *Giftedness: Living with it and Liking it.*

Elizabeth Meckstroth

PARENTING

Why do you think that 16 out of the last 18 children I've tested for intelligence have been boys? This is a ratio of 9:1!

These children's parents wanted to validate their impressions that their children might have exceptional abilities. The two girls? One was tested after her older brother scored in the 175 IQ range and the parents then considered that perhaps his sister might also have some abilities worth documenting. The other girl, barely 6, was upsetting her parents with excruciating behaviors like arguing her point until there was no room for opposition! Mom thought she was "just obnoxious"; Dad, an attorney, wanted to believe that she was bright!

Being gifted often means being intense, determined, passionately focused, highly energetic, questioning of authority, insatiably curious, and having an acute need for control. Do these behaviors seem more congruent for boys than for girls? Might they be easier to acknowledge and to promote for boys than for girls? There are too many instances when girls' abilities are overlooked and unappreciated.

What implications might you make from the following disparities?

1-In retesting the Terman sample, between the ages of 11 and 17, boys dropped an average of less than 3 points on the Stanford-Binet Intelligience Scale, whereas girls who were retested dropped about 13 points (Kerr, 1985)!

2-After high school valedictorians finished 2 years of college, 22% of the boys believed that they were brighter than their peers, but only 4% of the girls did (Berger, 1989).

3-On the combined S.A.T., girls score about 60 points below boys. Even on the verbal portion, girls now average 10 points lower (Mansnerus, 1989).

4-In students aged 12 to 15, about 65% of girls hide their ability; 15% of the boys camouflage their competence (Elias, 1986).

5-While boys tend to claim that they **earn** high grades, girls usually ascribe their achievements to **luck** (Keegan, 1989).

6-Studies on every level from preschool to graduate school show that girls are expected to be less confident and independent than boys (Keegan, 1989).

In their desire to be accepted and to "be nice," our accomodating daughters often allow us or their teachers or friends to control their fates. From responding to other peoples expectations rather than their own, our girls may grow into inauthentic women.

What have we learned from gifted women? In hindsight, they tell us, "I've lived a lie." "I've become an expert in other people's lives and a dunce in my own." I've facilitated everyone else's priorities but my own." "Please tell the girls, 'Don't get swallowed up in the social scene.'"

What can YOU do to enrich YOUR daughter's life?

- **Allow her to enjoy time alone – to read, to think, to dream.**
- **Encourage her to develop an encouraging relationship with a woman who likes her and who is in love with her own life and her work.**
- **Elaborate enthusiastically on the possibilities she foresees for herself.**
- **Mom, develop your own goals and invest in yourself!**

There's a whole world out there to tell her that her path is too long, too hard, her children will suffer, and she will get sued! YOU can honor her idealism, her belief in herself, her trust that the years are going to pass anyway – she might as well make something out of them. THIS IS HER LIFE! ■

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Elizabeth Meckstroth is a therapist and consultant in Evanston, Illinois and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child*.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Joyce VanTassel-Baska

The Fine Art of Discussion (Part I)

The fine art of discussion is an instructional strategy worthy of some discussion beyond the extent to which it has already been addressed in this column. In this issue and the next, I will describe several key points involving discussion as a technique for use with the gifted.

The gifted profit considerably from having the interaction of intellectual peers all focusing on a common issue or problem or theme. For many, the idea formation takes shape in the social interaction context through verbal articulation. Thus, without the strategy of discussion being used prevalently in classrooms at an appropriate level, learning for the gifted may be impeded.

The focus of a discussion with the gifted is also an important consideration. Just as activities need to be relevant and based on the interests of the learner, discussion topics have to follow a similar pattern in order to be successful. Moreover, to be truly growth-producing they need to operate at a reasonably abstract and complex level. In literature, for example, to discuss what characters are like, where the story took place, and what happens are basic elements but do not contribute to a stimulating discussion. Of greater interest to the gifted are issues such as why a given character may have behaved in a certain way or why an author introduced a particular idea or symbol or how effective a certain scene may be.

The nature of questions that frame a discussion with gifted learners requires serious consideration by teachers. It is recommended that question clusters be prepared ahead of time that serve deliberate functions within the discussion. For example, there need to be **basic factual questions** that substantiate a student's understanding of what has been read. There also need to be **interpretive questions** that lead the students into a deeper understanding of the text being studied, that provide a road map to the heart of the piece of literature and the author's purpose. There also need to be **divergent questions** that cause students to operate in a conditional framework related to the text under discussion. What if a character had behaved in the opposite way? How would the story have been affected? And lastly, there need to be **evaluative questions** that challenge the gifted student to make judgments about what he or she reads – overall judgments about a book and judgments about particular events in the book – and to provide rationale for those judgments.

Discussions should serve to stimulate the thinking of gifted learners in key ways. The following question paradigm illustrates the relationship between discussion questions in children's literature and the analogous thinking skill employed:

Observing:
What are the characters doing in this story?

Comparing:
How is this picture different from that one?

How is this story like the other one?

Classifying:
Feelings, type of story, what characters do.

Hypothesizing:
What do you think this character will do?

Organizing:
What happens in the story from the beginning to the end?

Summarizing:
Tell us about the best/funniest part of the story.

Evaluating:
What is your favorite story character?

In the next issue, I will cover prepackaged programs, question clusters, and promoting empathy. ■

Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Ed.D., is Jody and Layton Smith Professor of Education at William and Mary College, in Williamsburg, Virginia. She is editor of *Comprehensive Curriculum for Gifted Learners.*

HE READING ROOM

"It was a dark and stormy night." Some of you who recognize the first line of that famous beagle Snoopy's every literary endeavor may not know that the book that won the Newbery medal in 1962 begins exactly that way. The book, a science fiction novel of very special relevance to gifted kids, is Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time,* the first book in a series that includes *A Wind in the Door* and *A Swiftly Tilting Planet.*

Meg Murry, a brilliant, awkward, stubborn, rebellious thirteen year old whose self-image is as low as her dreadful grades in school, is the point of view character, though the pivotal figure in the family is actually her preschool brother, Charles Wallace. Charles is a "sport," or genetic anomaly—a more than brilliant child whose extraordinary intellectual gifts make him both powerful and exceptionally vulnerable. The story is a classic story of good fighting evil as Meg and Charles, with another highly gifted outside, fourteen year old Calvin O'Keefe, travel by tesseract (the "wrinkle in time") to other galaxies in an effort to save Meg's father, a scientist who has been imprisoned on a "dark" planet ruled by a pulsing, totalitarian brain. The children are helped by three celestial beings disguised as witches.

Though it can be read and enjoyed on many levels, this book is especially useful for discussion because it focuses on the value of differences, the uses (and the responsibilities) of special gifts and the dangers of arrogance.

The second book under discussion this issue is Ursula LeGuin's *The Wizard of Earthsea,* also the first book in a trilogy. Different as these two books are, they have much in common. This is a fantasy, complete with dragons, sorcerers, wizards and mages. The hero (in this case the term is accurate in all its classic meanings) is Ged, a child who shows such precocity (and *power*) that he is taken as an apprentice by the village witch. He learns so rapidly with her that he soon outdistances his teacher and is able to save his village from an invading army by casting and maintaining a difficult spell. A powerful mage becomes his next master and he soon goes on to the school for wizards, where he quickly becomes the top student, racing ahead of all others.

Here, again, the vulnerability of those with exceptional gifts and the dangers of arrogance are central to the story. Ged, reveling in his abilities, is tempted by a rival to cast a spell to raise the dead. Because of his inborn power, he succeeds, but he cannot control the forces he has invoked. A shadow is released from the darkness that attacks and nearly kills him, then pursues him across the islands and oceans of Earthsea, to turn his power to evil. He must confront and do battle with the dark thing he has unleashed if he is to live and learn to use his power in the service of good.

This book is a sophisticated consideration of the two sides of special abilities—for good and for evil. Both books suggest a fundamental moral principle—that those with exceptional gifts have a duty to develop them and to use them, not for personal gain or glory, but for service. ■

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RECLAIMING LOST GIFTEDNESS IN GIRLS

Linda Kreger Silverman, Ph.D.

Gifted girls are chameleons. From the time they enter preschool, they learn how to blend in with their peer group so that they are "just like" all the other girls. Their astonishing aptitude for social adaptation often prevents the detection of their giftedness, which, in turn, inhibits the development of their abilities. The adaptability of gifted girls has been noted as a barrier to their achievement (Kerr, 1985), but it has not been recognized as a special strength. However, when we compare the developmental patterns of gifted girls to those of gifted boys, we begin to wonder whether the boys in general are socially deficient or if the girls are socially talented.

Let me paint some typical scenarios...

Brian

It is the first day of preschool, and Brian, a developmentally advanced young man, bursts into the room ready to master this new frontier. He's been eagerly anticipating going to school. He is excited to share what he knows with all these new friends, and excited about all the new things he is going to learn. Brian is 4 going on 7, and he has already devoured a great deal of information about astronomy. So during recess he takes his new buddies on a space adventure, telling them all about planets, asteroids, meteorites, constellations, and mysterious black holes. One by one his little friends disappear, since obviously they don't know what he's talking about. Pretty soon, he's all alone – a leader without followers.

Undaunted, Brian returns to the classroom looking for an interesting person to talk to, and he finds her... his teacher. Preoccupied with his own thoughts, he completely monopolizes his teacher until she has to remind him that he isn't the only one in the room and she needs to pay attention to the others as well. So now Brian has to find something to do to keep his active mind occupied. He glances at the other children's activities and wonders why anyone would want to play such silly games. He remarks offhandedly, "That's stupid. What are you doing that for?" This doesn't win him too many close friends.

If the teacher pushes Brian into joining the other children in their activities, he is likely to engage in some acting out behavior. He will invent ingenious ways to annoy his classmates, and if he gets into enough trouble, eventually he may withdraw and play by himself. One kindergartener I worked with spent every recess playing by himself in the sandbox. The "readiness" examiner was quite concerned that the boy was displaying signs of "social immaturity" and recommended that he be held back in school. When his mother asked him why he was spending all his time in the sandbox, he replied, "Oh, I'm categorizing all the crystals. You should see them, Mom!"

Notice all of the ways Brian demonstrates his giftedness: on the playground he shows leadership, imagination and advanced knowledge; in the classroom, he selects the teacher as an intellectual companion, invents ways to cause trouble, and independently entertains himself. You can't help but notice Brian and see how different he is from the other children. He just doesn't fit in. Brian and his giftedness are **visible**. Gifted girls usually display a completely opposite pattern – they become **invisible**.

Caitlin

Caitlin's age and IQ are the same as Brian's (chronologically 4 years, mentally 7 years). It's her first day of preschool. She is cautious about leaving her mother, and spends a great deal of time watching the other children before she begins to participate. Gradually she starts to imitate their behavior. She sees that Jennifer, the little girl next to her, is scribbling with an orange crayon in her left hand. "I can do that," Caitlin tells herself confidently. She picks up an orange crayon in her left hand (Caitlin is right-handed), and copies Jennifer's scribble. With an anxious smile, she shows the scribble to her teacher and asks, "Is this good?" "That's wonderful, Caitlin!" responds the teacher warmly, and Caitlin happily repeats her performance.

And that is exactly what it is: a **performance** designed to win approval. Caitlin is a brilliant performer. At home her multimedia artwork decorates all the walls, and neighbors remark about her advanced understanding of color, form and texture. But, of course, her teacher knows nothing about this. All she sees is Caitlin's school act. Caitlin fits in very well with the other little girls. She plays all their games. She practices her colors, numbers and letters. She listens attentively and does exactly what is expected of her.

There is a marked discrepancy between (*Continued on page 8*)

Caitlin's behavior at home and at school. Caitlin knew all the primary colors at 20 months, recited the alphabet at 2 years, memorized several books and could count 20 objects by 2 1/2, wrote her first name at 3 years, and taught herself to read at 3 1/2. She watches National Geographic videos endlessly and knows a great deal about animals.

At school, however, Caitlin never talks about animals and doesn't let anyone know she can read. She never complains about the work being too easy. She asks the teacher for help zipping her jacket, although she mastered this fine motor skill a year ago. She frequently lapses into "baby talk." On one occasion when she did this at home, her mother snapped at her, "Caitlin, act your age!" To which Caitlin responded, "But Mommy, I am acting my age. I'm acting just like all the other girls in my class."

Why is Caitlin playing this game? The answer is poignantly revealed by a 5-year-old girl whose mother wrote me this letter.

> *I have a daughter who is in public school in kindergarten... At the first parent/teacher conference I was informed that she was working at or below grade level. She was in a low pre-reading group and a low math group. (She has been reading since three years old and has done basic addition and math since four.)*
>
> *I urged them to please look more closely. At another conference at semester end the teacher informed me of something strange which she had discovered. When my daughter worked with her best friend she worked below grade level (as did her friend – she is below grade level). In fact their work was almost identical. With more advanced children she worked at their level. The quality of her work seemed to depend almost entirely on her association.*
>
> *When asked about this, she thought about it for awhile and then told me she wanted the other kids to like her. I am unable to convince her that she doesn't have to do this to be liked. To her, being friends is to be just like each other. She is extremely adaptable.*
>
> *The school is becoming aware, but is not willing to help very much. They gave her a reading test two weeks ago and she reads fourth grade level. They are unprepared to do anything. She continues in a pre-reading group.* (**emphasis added**)

SOCIAL ADAPTABILITY

Brian is in danger of being held back in kindergarten, punished for his inability to relate to children his own chronological age. Ironically, he is called "socially immature," whereas Caitlin, who is regressing to baby talk, is seen as "mature." It is easy to think of Caitlin as "normal," and Brian as a social clutz. But if we look at their coping strategies through another lens, Brian's behavior becomes much more understandable and Caitlin's almost miraculous.

These are not age-appropriate skills or realistic expectations for any child. It is not easy to lop off two or three years of development to fit in with children less advanced, and it is a wonder that anyone manages to achieve it.

Imagine what it would be like to be a short fourth grader placed in a first grade class. How would you relate to the other children or to the curriculum? You could be a big sister or brother, or an assistant teacher, but you would have to live without any real friends – without anyone who understood you. You would have to figure out how to play with children whose games were not interesting and play by rules that seemed crude and unfair. You would have to learn how to explain your ideas in simpler terms that others could understand. You would have to wait patiently while others struggle with concepts you have known for some time. You would have to refrain from answering all the teacher's questions so that others can have an opportunity to participate. You would have to be very careful not to reveal what you really know.

This is exactly the dilemma of the child who is developmentally advanced. A gifted child is mentally two or three years beyond his or her agemates. Almost everyone in our society **expects** young gifted children to fit in with others their own chronological age, regardless of the differences in their development. Yet, we have no appreciation of the **complexity** of that task. Read the last paragraph again and imagine trying to teach these skills. **These are not age-appropriate skills or realistic expectations for any child.** It is not easy to lop off two or three years of development to fit in with children less advanced, and it is a wonder that anyone manages to achieve it. We never recognize the amazing social feat gifted girls perform daily.

We don't know what enables gifted girls to master these complex social skills so easily at such a tender age. It may be purely the result of environmental programming or maybe girls have an "adaptability gene" that boys don't have; it probably is some combination. We do know that gifted girls fit in by pretending to be less capable than they really are, and that this habit pattern often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Borland, 1986). If elementary school work is too easy, girls are unprepared to meet the challenges of advanced coursework later on, *(Continued on page 9)*

avoid more difficult courses, (which unnecessarily limits their career choices), and come to believe that they really aren't smart (Dweck, 1986).

Girls' social adaptability is perceived as a defect because it interferes with their motivation to excel. Gifted boys, on the other hand, are **not** skillful at hiding their abilities, and their inability to falsify themselves is viewed as a social defect. However, when we place gifted boys and girls in programs with others like themselves, the problems, perceptions, and maladaptive patterns magically disappear. Disruptive boys stop acting out when they find real friends and a stimulating curriculum. Girls stop hiding their abilities in an environment in which it is safe to be gifted. Their adaptive powers **work for them** instead of against them when they can emulate other girls as bright as themselves. This is why gifted education is so essential.

HOW CAN WE HELP GIFTED GIRLS?

- **Identify them early**, before they have developed ingrained patterns of hiding. The best age for testing gifted girls is between 4 and 7. By the time gifted girls are 8 or 9, their favorite response to test items is "I don't know." They will not guess on items they aren't absolutely certain they will get right. This quickly depresses their IQ scores.

- **Find them gifted peers.** These are children of similar mental abilities and similar interests. They may be female or male, older, younger or the same age. Parent support groups provide good networks for locating other gifted children.

- **Place them in special programs.** Help promote classes for gifted students that stimulate and challenge them. In talking with women who retained their view of themselves as gifted, many were in classes with extremely bright girls who worked hard and supported each other.

- **Consider early entrance.** Gifted girls are often ready for school early and have an excellent track record of adjustment if they are placed right from the beginning with older peers (Daurio, 1979).

- **Don't let them drop out of math.** Girls should be encouraged to take every math course possible, and as early as they can get into them. Math courses open doors to their future that are forever closed if they are allowed to quit after geometry.

- **Introduce them to role models.** Enable them to meet women who have made different choices with their lives: top executives, homemakers, researchers, single women, women with no children, married career women with children. Expose them to many alternatives and discuss the possibilities. Have them read biographies of eminent women and lesser known heroines who have devoted themselves to their families and community service.

- **Involve Dad in their lives.** Research indicates that fathers play a significant role in the aspirations of their daughters (Lemkau, 1983). If Daddy believes in her, she believes in herself.

- **Hold high expectations.** Parental expectations and expectations of teachers strongly affect girls' expectations of themselves. If a girl is allowed to slide by just performing what she already knows, she gradually loses her belief in her ability to master the unknown. Early challenges build self-confidence. Provide assistance and encouragement with new tasks.

- **Avoid sex-role stereotyping.** Who sets the table in your house? Who takes out the garbage? Pay attention to the tasks you assign, the games you purchase, and the subtle messages you convey about girls' activities and boys' activities. Typical girls' activities are limiting and teach passivity rather than independence.

- **Encourage independence and risk-taking.** Everyone in a gifted girl's life should help her to take chances, and support her independence. Overprotectiveness breeds fear.

Gifted girls don't have to become invisible. In the right environment, with the proper support of parents and teachers, they can shine throughout their school careers and become the gifted women they were meant to be.

(For more suggestions, please see "The Hidden Gifted Learner" in the last issue of *Understanding Our Gifted, 2* (1), 3 and L. K. Silverman (1986), "What Happens to the Gifted Girl?") ■

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development of a gifted girl, the significant adults in her life must acknowledge her emotional core. When a gifted girl "falls in love" with an idea (Kerr, 1985), she can summon great courage and energy, which, in turn, may be very threatening to others. Her emotional drive can make others uncomfortable, particularly if she has a creative vision that hasn't been done before. If she is perceived as "too strong," "too idealistic," or "overly emotional," her pursuits may be blocked by individuals in positions of authority.

An example is a high school freshman who wanted to take senior Advanced Placement English in her first year. She could demonstrate the necessary competencies and she had the determination to try to get the proposal accepted by her school, but it was an uphill battle. Another example is a highly capable student at the middle school level who wanted to go directly to college without high school. Both of these girls had firm perceptions of their needs, their goals, and the pathway to the achievement of their goals, but they were perceived as stubborn and unyielding. Eventually, however, they succeeded.

It is critical to have someone who cares who will listen and with whom you can share your thoughts.

In our roles as parents, friends and mentors of gifted girls, we must value and nurture their emotional foundation as natural and positive. We can work with them on effective communication and appropriate leadership techniques to enable them to put their powerful emotions to work positively for themselves and others. A step in the right direction would be to discuss emotions with these girls in a matter-of-fact way, with positive support for the idea that caring deeply about people and things is normal. Gifted girls need experience, discussion, and instruction in being honest about their emotions. Therefore, a healthy give and take is important with trusted friends and role models with whom they share mutual respect. In this way, gifted girls learn to explore ideas and work through conflicts to understand themselves and others around them. They see this involvement with significant others as crucial to their healthy growth and development.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Intellectual and emotional development are inextricably linked. Gifted girls must believe in their abilities before they can develop aspirations based on those abilities. Only in this century have we realized that the intellectual capacities of females are equal to those of males (Hollingworth, 1916). It is difficult to comprehend the impact of generations of inequity on the motivational patterns of bright females. Parents and teachers need to understand the constraints against feminine achievement and provide opportunities for learning that match gifted girls' ability and potential to achieve. These girls need special experiences that will provide compensation for environmental and internal influences which can work against their ultimate achievement.

Some of the adverse influences on gifted females include:

- conflicting role expectations;
- sex-role stereotyping;
- few similar ability peers;
- no role models for achievement;
- lack of leadership opportunities; and
- low parental encouragement for career achievement.

The gifted female faces conflict on a number of issues. She must deal with her giftedness as well as herself as a woman in relation to others. Some highly gifted girls may choose social isolation over conformity if none of their true interests coincide with those of their peers. This choice is a painful one for parents to accept. To other gifted girls, being well adjusted means "...being similar enough to the average to avoid notice and gain approval" (Kerr, 1985, p. 89). The gifted girl may suppress performance in some environments if she believes that achieving may lead to being unpopular or unfeminine. Some young people fear being different for any reason and great anxiety can be the result (Hollingworth, 1928).

Conflicting expectations for success of a gifted girl and her parents may play an important role in her choice of activities. Females view their world from a social orientation which has been reinforced since the earliest stages of their development (Gilligan, 1982; Kerr, 1985). When achievement threatens interpersonal acceptance in females, their anxiety may hinder their performance. An example might be a college class offered to high school students off campus; a gifted girl may elect not to leave her social peers to take advantage of the course. However, encouragement from parents or teachers can make a big difference in the decision. According to Hollingworth (1928), the ability of a young person to make such a choice "...depends largely on the degree to which parents have fostered self-reliance and progressive attitude in childhood" (p. 46).

Role models are important for gifted girls. Capable girls need exposure to successful women to help formulate similar expectations for themselves. Girls exhibit different achievement expectations than do boys. Parents are more likely to place greater emphasis on the special school, college, graduate school and career plans of their gifted sons than their daughters (Fox & Turner, 1981). The gifted girl may receive less attention in the classroom from her teachers because the teachers tend to "...talk more, question more and generate more feedback with boys" (Sadker & Sadker, in press). *(Continued on next page)*

If a capable girl has the potential of being ignored or lost in school, does that mean that every gifted girl should be sent to a single sex school? There is research to support the positive growth and development that occur for girls and women in a single sex environment (Astin, 1977), but it is not practical nor is it necessary, if parents and teachers are aware of the social imbalance that exists and act to insure that gifted girls have equal access to resources and are encouraged to take advantage of them.

Parents of a gifted girl need to be open-minded about all of the possibilities that may lie ahead for their daughter and encourage her to take risks and try new ideas and activities. They need to resist the traditional and more protective approach to the development of girls in general. If the public schools do not recognize their daughter's abilities or cannot provide for her development, parents may need to consider special schooling designed to meet the needs of gifted students in order to enable their daughter to develop her own special talents.

WHAT DO GIFTED GIRLS NEED?

An informal survey was sent to 22 gifted girls ages 13-19 to investigate their affective needs. Twenty of the surveys were returned and the following summaries of their responses are informative.

When asked the importance of **involvement** in their lives, they responded:

Involvement is crucial to life. It is important to building self-confidence and self-concept because gifted girls can be so isolated from one another. Involvement with others helps people to discover new parts of themselves both good and bad. It helps to focus ideas and energies on things that are important. Without involvement no-one knows who you really are and you stay inside yourself. A gifted girl without involvement with people and activities may lose her drive to see what her abilities can accomplish.

When asked to comment on **close personal relationships** the responses were:

Close personal relationships are important because they supply moral support. Identity can be found through discussions with those whom you trust. Close personal relationships are particularly important to gifted girls and women because they encourage exploration and risk taking. Ideas might be explored alone, but discussing those ideas with close friends can often result in great discoveries, new feelings and unusual sides to an issue. It is critical to have someone who cares who will listen and with whom you can share your thoughts.

It seems as though gifted girls have a broader spectrum of emotions, always looming very close to the surface.

In response to **relationships with staff members**, they responded:

It is important to know that the staff cares and that what they do with you is more than a job. They can help you get direction toward long term goals. Staff can be very helpful in pulling me out of myself and drawing me into the understanding of myself. You must be able to trust staff in order to talk with them and receive the benefit of their point of view. It can be a very comforting and affirming relationship. Gifted girls need the company of older women especially.

In regard to **emotions** they responded:

It seems as though gifted girls have a broader spectrum of emotions, always looming very close to the surface. It is critical that a gifted girl be able to talk about them and learn that they are normal for someone of her abilities. Fortunately, I had someone say to me that I was entitled to my emotions and deserved to have time to deal with them openly. I know that my emotions generally guide the way I act and live and I am glad that I know enough about them to accept that fact. My emotions are constantly changing like cloud formations on a windy day, and I enjoy exploring them to learn how to find balance. I understand that my emotions are very strong and I am learning to understand them by thinking about them and talking to my friend about them.

It is obvious from the girls' responses to the survey that their emotions and the process of discovering them is central to their development. It follows, then, that people who interact with gifted girls need to consider the importance of their emotional base and work with the girls not only to increase their understanding of themselves, but also to nurture a positive feeling about who they are becoming.

In another survey of high school students, 99% of the students felt that **trust** is the most vital element in any relationship. Trust is the critical factor in the actions and interactions with friends and family. Trust can be established by open, honest communication. Gifted girls need to be allowed time to work through their own dilemmas with support. If parents and teachers take the time to listen to gifted girls with positive feedback and constructive criticism, the girls will become more self-reliant. Listening to small problems in a calm, accepting manner with good eye contact will lead to the sharing of those larger problems that usually are held deep within. A gifted girl's mind is able to solve whatever problem is presented if she feels that she is trusted and someone cares about her. Her ability to tackle problems will be enhanced if she feels that her listener understands and trusts her and if she feels comfortable (*Continued next page*)

subgroups of high ability students. As early as 1926, Hollingworth reported that exceptionally gifted students may experience special adjustment problems, and this conclusion was repeated in a recent review by Janos and Robinson (1985).

In addition, studies which find healthy adjustment among gifted *children* may not generalize to gifted *adolescents*, since there is evidence of greater adjustment problems during those years (Janos & Robinson, 1985).

Furthermore, few studies have concentrated particularly on the adjustment of gifted females. Academically talented females face special problems in adolescence because society and our culture may encourage them to refrain from exhibiting their intellectual abilities and may discourage high achievement (Callahan, 1979; Eccles, 1987). Thus, even though adolescence is considered a critical period for identity development, talented females may experience particular difficulty in establishing their identity as women and in accepting their exceptional abilities.

Parents of gifted children typically demonstrate strong commitment to their children and make conscientious efforts to facilitate and promote the development of their abilities and talents (Cornell, 1984). Nevertheless, parents may face special problems in understanding and communicating with capable adolescents (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982). Unfortunately, there is little research support for the parent advice literature addressing these concerns; very little is known about the relationship between family variables and adolescent adjustment in gifted youth.

Research on comparing high ability youth and their families to the so-called "normal" controls has served the purpose of shattering popular stereotypes and misconceptions that high ability is necessarily associated with maladjustment. However, the new questions which deserve future research attention are not whether high ability youth differ from other youth, but how these youth and their families differ from one another, and what family characteristics are associated with healthy development and positive adjustment in this population.

The quality of parent-child communication is critical to the positive adjustment of talented adolescents (Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982). According to Cooper (1982), family communication affects adolescent identity formation, which in turn influences self-esteem. Because adolescence is a time of increasing independence and emotional autonomy from parents, there is potential strain in the parent-adolescent relations at this time.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CONCEPT IN TALENTED WOMEN

There is agreement in the literature that self-concept related variables are predictive of achievement in women. Studies have consistently reported more positive self-concepts and higher levels of self-esteem among career-oriented women. Also, greater self-esteem is associated with stronger career orientation among adolescents. Self-esteem is strongly related to achievement motivation in college age females. And high levels of self-esteem are characteristic of women in male-oriented professions. Probably of even greater importance is that academic self-concept consistently has been shown to influence academic success, career choice and test performance (Eccles, 1987). [*See Note 1*]

The relationship of the present generation of mothers with their gifted daughters is particularly interesting. This current generation of young gifted women has received special attention and encouragement to pursue special programs, non-traditional careers, and high levels of achievement. This presents a potential source of conflict and reduced communication between these daughters and their mothers because the mothers have not had the same (*Continued on page 13*)

(*Continued from page 11*) enough to verbalize the real-life situations she faces. This is also the way to affirm the gifted girl's emotional core.

A gifted girl has many options in her present and future. Parents must be clear in their own expectations for their gifted daughter and communicate directly with her from her early years up through her adolescence. Teachers must also be a source of encouragement and support. With enlightened parenting, schooling and counseling, gifted girls can better understand themselves and value their own emotional foundation rather than denying it as society might dictate. ■

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encouragement and may have more traditional gender-linked expectations for their daughters.

THE STUDY

Sixty gifted girls ranging in age from 13 to 17 participated in our study. Forty-two of these students were enrolled in a residential early-college-entrance program for adolescent females, and 18 ninth and tenth graders were enrolled in traditional high school honors classes. We hoped that selection of students from two types of programs would help assure a broad and representative sample. Almost all of the students were from intact, two-parent families, although it was known that four had divorced parents and one child's parents were separated. Parents were very well educated. Sixty-eight percent of the mothers and 80% of the fathers had earned at least a bachelor's degree.

All students completed a battery of questionnaires including measures of adolescent self-concept (Harter Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents) and parent-adolescent communication (Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale). Students were also assessed individually by the *Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (Revised).*

IMPLICATIONS

The wide range of scores on both the self-perception scales and the parent adolescent communication scales suggests that there is probably no typical family communication pattern among gifted female adolescents. These young women appear to have higher than average conceptions of their school ability and general self-worth, but do not differ from the norm in the other areas. Nevertheless, **there appears to be a negative relationship between the girls IQ scores and their perceived competence in several nonacademic areas, including social competence, physical appearance, and athletic ability.** This finding lends some support to Hollingworth's (1926) observation that the most intelligent of gifted youth experienced the most adjustment problems.

THE LINK BETWEEN SELF-CONCEPT AND PARENT COMMUNICATION

A central finding of the study is that the quality of parent-adolescent communication is consistently associated with the young women's self-concept. Daughters who enjoy more positive and open communication with their parents have higher perceptions of their competence in a wide range of areas. There were significant positive correlations for both fathers and mothers in the areas of school competence, conduct-morality, close friends, and global self-worth. In addition, better communication with mothers was associated with more favorable self-perceptions of job competence and romantic appeal.

Daughters who enjoy more positive and open communication with their parents have higher perceptions of their competence in a wide range of areas.

Curiously, the only significant negative correlation in this set of analyses was between father-daughter communication and athletic competence. It appears that adolescent females who enjoy closer relationships with their fathers have poorer self-conceptions of their athletic ability. This was the only competence area in which the correlations for mothers and fathers were significantly different. We don't fully understand the reason for this finding. Overall, these results suggest a consistent, although only modest, relationship between adolescent self-concept and parent communication.

Healthy parent communication appears to have a positive influence on an adolescent's self-concept. It is probably also the case that adolescents with healthy self-concepts are better able to communicate with their parents. In the real world, interpersonal relationships are mutually influential.

The results of this study emphasizes the link between an adolescent's individual adjustment and her relationships with her parents. Efforts to improve the quality in one area may be facilitated by attention to the other.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS

These findings that there is a strong link between a young women's communication with her parents and her self-concept suggest the importance of establishing communication very early in life. The more ways in which you find to communicate and the more practice you have in communicating in many settings while your daughter is young, the more likely it is that you will have many options for communication when your daughter reaches adolescence.

- **Acknowledge your daugther's right to an opinion; listen to her reasoning and her arguments.** You may not agree with the premise or the logic or the conclusions and your experience may make you cringe at her naivete, but try to remember your own arguments at a similar age. *Listening does not mean waiting your turn to speak. It means hearing and acknowledging the proposal.* Reflect rather than correct. "So you think that going to the movies on a school night will not interfere with your performance at school. How will you know that?"

- **Ask questions rather than making statements.** (*Continued on page 14*)

For example, "Have you considered an alternative possibility?" Try to reach compromises that acknowledge and respect her concerns and logic, not only your values. It is perfectly acceptable to make your values clear and to make judgments that will protect your daughter from harm, but healthy development requires that she learn to make responsible decisions. Give her practice in both making decisions and judging the consequences of those decisions. Try to suppress "I told you so" or "What did you learn?" when things don't work out as your daughter expected or when the consequences of a decision she has made are negative. Try to substitute expressions which acknowledge her disappointment and give her the opportunity to explore reasons why things may not have worked out. Consider "I'm sorry things didn't work out as you had hoped" or "Do you wish you had done something differently?"

- **Look for natural ways to communicate.** It is easier to carry on a conversation when doing things together than it is to sit face to face to "have a talk." Consider opportunities when you can work on fixing something together, make or build something together, work out together, select and wrap family gifts together, etc. Often children bring their parents a broken toy or radio or appliance and the parent agrees to fix it rather than taking the opportunity to both teach skills in fixing it and using the time to talk.

- **Involve your daughter in family planning and decisions whenever appropriate and feasible.** Where will you go on the next family vacation? What are the criteria to be used in selecting a family vacation spot?

- **Try to talk about things that are important to her as well as those things that are important to you.** Notice what music she listens to, what movies she goes to, what books she reads, who she is friends with and ask questions about them. You may hear more than you can ever remember, but it will establish a respect for her judgments. It will also give her the chance to verbalize criteria for choices and practice evaluation skills.

- **While it is important to be actively interested in your daughter and her activities, avoid "grilling."** Adolescents often feel that parents are prying into their lives. This is a time when it is natural to want to set up a private part of life that is not shared with parents. Be sensitive to those times when she does not want to share and respect that need for privacy. That is also part of good communication.

NOTE 1: This article is an adaptation of a research paper entitled, "Perceived Competence and Parent-Adolescent Communication in High Ability Females," which will be published in The Journal for the Education of the Gifted (in press). Please refer to this article for a complete list of references. ■

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Kathi Kearney

HE HIGHLY GIFTED

Highly Gifted Children And Their Families: Suggestions For Educators (Part I)

It is no secret that highly gifted children are often a challenge to work with, as well as a joy. Educating these children and effectively working with their families at times seem puzzling to even the most conscientious educator. More than sixty years ago, Leta Hollingworth observed that of these very high IQ children,

> *...nearly all have been school problems. They do not fit into the routine of the school. In many cases neither they nor their teachers understand the reason for the misfit* (Hollingworth, 1926, p. 265).

Understanding why these children and their families react the way they do, and why the school setting can be one of the most problematic for them, is a key element in knowing how to assist these children in making positive educational and social adjustments. In this column and the next, guidelines are provided to help educators increase their ability to work effectively with these children and their families.

Learn all you can about the needs of highly gifted children. Highly gifted children have a unique set of intellectual and social/emotional needs. Working with them in educational and counseling settings if often very different from working with children of average ability, or even moderately gifted students (Silverman, 1989). It is ironic that despite a growing research literature about giftedness, the most gifted children tend to have been the least studied (Feldman, 1979). The inevitable result for educators and parents is that there are still very few comprehensive sources of information about this population. Three sources recommended to educators, counselors, and parents are:

1. Hollingworth, L.S. (1942). *Children above 180 IQ Stanford-Binet*. New York: World Book Company.
2. Feldman, D.H. (1986). *Nature's gambit: Child prodigies and the development of human potential*. New York: Basic Books.
3. *Roeper Review*, February, 1984, and December, 1987. Special feature sections on the highly gifted.

Listen to the child's parents, and understand the family's perspective. Families of highly gifted children usually have a better sense of their child's needs than the school or any other agency. This is due to several factors: extremely gifted children, especially girls, may hide their true abilities from their teachers and peers; knowing that they are perceived as "different," some children only confide their feelings about school in a "safe" environment such as the home; and if there is frustration about the pace and content of the schoolwork, parents are much more likely to hear about it first.

Families often react to the news that their child is highly gifted in one of two ways – they either enter a process of denial, or they attempt to learn all they can abut the child's exceptionality. As they work through this process, they usually come to perceive their parenting role as both a great responsibility and a deep joy. And finally, if they seem demanding at times, it is probably because they have encountered frustrating experiences in trying to meet their child's unusual needs. Schools and curricula are not generally organized to meet the needs of these children; relatives and neighbors may be less than understanding about the six-year-old who has the vocabulary of an 11-year-old and wants to learn algebra; and the support systems in place for the parents of other exceptional children are almost nonexistent for families of the exceptionally gifted. **These families need support and encouragement, as well as a flexible educational environment for their child.** Understanding the special needs of the family that nurtures the highly gifted child is extremely important.

In the next issue, this series of suggestions for educators who work with families of the highly gifted continues, with a focus on flexibility, support systems, and educational services. ■

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IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY

Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack
Tour Guide

YELLOW PAGES

On this encounter we will "let your fingers do the walking." If that phrase has a familiar ring, it should. For years it has been the key slogan used to promote the use of the phone book yellow pages. The yellow pages offer fun, challenging, *and* free exploration for creative youth. There are many productive ways parents and teachers can use the yellow pages creatively. The following are but a few starting points.

First, the prerequisite – the yellow pages. There should be a copy of the yellow pages in every classroom and in every family car. With the yellow pages in the hands of the kids, start the journey.

You are on a long drive and the children are bored. Try this alternative. Each family member takes a turn at **creating a hypothetical problem that requires the use of the yellow pages.** Everyone (except for the driver!) also takes a turn finding the information needed to solve the problem. Here is an example: Dad goes to the mall and accidentally locks the keys in the car. Whom can he call to get relief?

Give each child a five minute turn with the yellow pages to **find the most unusual profession or trade listed.** A family vote decides the winner.

The family is shopping on Saturday and decides to have Chinese food for lunch. **What choices of restaurants do you have within reasonable driving distance?** Which restaurant has the most appealing ad?

At home, in the car, or in the classroom, children can explore the yellow pages to **find the most creative business logo, the must unusual advertising gimmick, and the cleverest advertising slogan.**

In the classroom, students can **examine the many advertising techniques** used in the yellow pages. What psychological techniques are employed to draw the attention of readers to various ads?

Whenever a student chooses a topic for **independent study,** the yellow pages should be considered as an initial resource. Suppose John has decided to learn more about parrots, and Barbara has decided she wants to learn about desktop publishing. **What resources can they find in the yellow pages?** A quick trip to the yellow pages will help them locate valuable allies who can save them hours of initial research time. A pet shop owner may tell John there is a definitive book that is must reading, and also invite him into the store for a free lesson on grooming parrots. Similarly, Barbara may find a mentor in the desktop publishing business who will introduce her to that field.

Students can also flex their creative muscles by designing ads for the yellow pages. After all the students have had time to become familiar with the yellow pages, ask each one to select a profession, trade, or service in which he or she has an interest. Each student then selects one business from their chosen field and **designs an original display advertisement** to promote the business in the yellow pages. Finally, each student writes a letter to the business and encloses his or her artwork and text for the new ad. Only Scrooge would fail to respond to each child with a nice thank you note.

Of course, we have not even mentioned the **classification and categorization skills** which can be learned from the exploration of the yellow pages, but that subject awaits another journey. Meanwhile, happy walking through those incredibly versatile yellow pages! ■

Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Gifted Education at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and editor of *G/T News.*

Thomas M. Buescher

ADOLESCENT PASSAGES

The Benefits of Summer Programs

Each summer increased numbers of talented young adolescents enroll in specialized programs to enhance their abilities. Offerings range from a week or two to over a month, covering talents in mathematics and science, literature and the humanities, and the visual and performing arts. Long-standing university programs, like those at Northwestern, Johns Hopkins, Duke, University of Denver, and Purdue, where intense accelerated programs for young adolescents were pioneered, have been joined by fine programs sponsored by state and local educational districts. While programs vary in costs, services, and opportunities, most aim to provide educational experiences that are difficult to duplicate during the regular school year.

Measured Gains

Established programs have been careful to document and evaluate the benefits of special summer programs for talented students. Their research findings have not only broadened our understanding of how opportunities affect the talent development of young people, but also have given impetus to a wider scope of programs for more youngsters. The impact has seen a huge increase in summer options for talented students both at home and away.

What do summer programs provide for youngsters who take advantage of them? Systematic studies at the larger regional university programs have reported significant gains in academic performance and skill competence, strengthened self-esteem and self-image, greater clarification about strengths and liabilities related to identified talent areas, and more realistic expectations for the career paths one might consider. Follow-up data collected from thousands of young adolescents indicates program participants have enrolled in greater numbers of advanced level courses and mastery-level experiences in the arts and sciences. Most programs also report high numbers of returning students from one summer to the next.

Unanticipated Benefits

More interesting in some ways than these measured gains are the unanticipated benefits specialized summer programs appear to induce. Parents in particular, and secondary school teachers as well, comment in letters, telephone conversations, and direct contacts with program directors across the country about startling changes occurring with an adolescent son or daughter. Some are vivid: changes in responsible behavior, self-discipline, confidence in challenging or stressful situations, and willingness to seek out opportunities that stretch and mold identified talents. Other changes are subtle but still dramatic. Some teenagers, for example, report that for the first time in years they were able to meet, enjoy, and interact deeply with a peer. Sometimes friendships and acquaintances continue for months and years, renewed at subsequent summer sessions.

More striking are the changes in how summer program participants understand, accept, and cope with the demands of academic or artistic talent. One study in particular has linked the changes in how talented adolescents adjust to their talents with improvements in self esteem and confidence following summer program experiences (Buescher and Higham, 1989). Their talents become assets rather than liabilities in the social world of school.

Ongoing Benefits for Development

Special programs that understand and integrate the normative needs of talented young adolescents fill a void in the process of talent development. Combining outstanding program resources, staff, and venturesome opportunities, it is clear that well-designed programs boost the minds and spirits of young people in unforeseen ways throughout the adolescent passage. For some adolescents, the greatest gain is the realization that their talents are essential components of who they are; they cannot be quickly disclaimed or disowned. That insight alone is ample justification for encouraging talented boys and girls aged twelve to fifteen to immerse themselves in summer opportunities. Their horizons will expand and their abilities stretch to new levels of competence, confidence, and productivity.■

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Dorothy Knopper

ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

By the time you read this, the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program, with a budget of 7.8 million dollars, will be a reality. Dr. Patricia O'Connell Ross, of Johns Hopkins University, is the new Director of the Gifted Education Program, authorized by the Javits Act, and administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the United States Department of Education.

The process is in place for the establishment of the National Center for Research and Development in the Education of Gifted and Talented Children and Youth, as well as the funding of grant proposals for gifted and talented education programs across the nation. Hopefully we will conclude the 20th century with strong federal support of gifted education and the prioritizing of programs for outstanding youngsters in every school district in the United States.

President George Bush's vision of a "kinder gentler nation" may have direct implications for education in the form of curricular reforms focusing on values, decision-making and critical thinking, and student self esteem. President Bush wants to be known as the Education President. I hope we can also know him as the Gifted Education President.

Amidst such optimism – the support in terms of budget and personnel, the implementation of theory and research, the spotlighting of exemplary programs – there remains one critical concern: Are we meeting the needs of the individual child? Jim Sutton's poem emphasizes this concern.

Schools/Prisons Are a Mind of State

"Dear kinder, gentler": ...

I hope I see the day when
children bloom
larger than shadow, "daring
to be free,"
instead of sitting corner'd like a fool.
Waiting with far too many for too few
while screw'd to chairs.
Give each a custom plan.
Imagine how much greater all wd be
if each cd have a plan that set
one free. (Sutton, 1989)

It is an exciting time for gifted education. We now have long overdue federal support designed to elevate awareness and activate curriculum improvement. It would seem that we could now sit back and literally reap the harvest of our advocacy efforts. But not yet – not until each child has a custom plan to "set one free."

We are indeed in need of a "kinder gentler" personalized approach to education. The needs of the individual child must come before the bureaucratic needs of that institution called education. We are advocates for gifted education, but more importantly we advocate for the uniqueness of the gifted child. ■

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Dorothy Knopper is State Consultant on the Gifted, Colorado Department of Education and "Open Space" columnist for *Roeper Review*.

Linda Sinclair

from parent to parent

Watching our gifted children learn to accept their giftedness is one of the most difficult aspects we face as parents. We know they will suffer the pangs of being looked upon as different and we know they will learn to deal with these feelings, but in our hearts, we ache for our children who will experience psychological pain beyond their years.

For that reason, it is always refreshing to talk with a parent who has successfully traversed the same path you are struggling on, and who can tell you that there is life after elementary school. One such parent is Debbie Datta of Pasadena, California."Both of my daughters are gifted, but they are very different in how they interact with their peers. Rupa, who is 9, cares deeply about what her classmates think. Her teacher says she always has the answer to questions in class, but when she answers too often, and is teased by her peers, she feels uncomfortable. Ruchira, who is 16 and attending Caltech University, is not as concerned with these things. She knows that all kids are different; she has her own personality and is very friendly.

"Rupa is slowly learning to accept her giftedness, rather than trying so hard. Every gifted child must learn to accept that she is different, whether she likes it or not. For gifted children to survive, they need to understand that it is better to be themselves and risk not belonging than be someone else and belong. Rupa is learning to care less about belonging.

"I have tried to let both girls just be themselves and give them both the opportunity to grow and discover what they can become. I encouraged them to learn morals and rules we live by as a family, but they have not been pushed in any direction in terms of their futures. I do not want to discourage them in anything.

"We have a tremendous responsiblity in parenting gifted children. We have to learn to deal with less than ideal situations, such as schooling or society's preconceived notions about gifted children. Society does not understand or have sympathy for gifted children, because they cannot grasp the problems or issues we face. The educational system of this country is not geared to gifted children and their needs.

"From the beginning, I talked to many parents, educators, and others who had worked with gifted children. I knew that as a mother I would not be objective in all situations, so I did a lot of research. As parents of gifted children we have to provide our children with more than a good home. We also need to give them all the opportunities, constant stimulation, and we need to work very hard to meet the challenges we are faced with. It takes a lot of effort, but it pays off.

"You have to encourage gifted children to be independent, so they will have a sense of discovery about life. You don't want them to be puppets, just doing what others tell them. I do not see my children as extensions of myself or as a means to fulfill my dreams. I believe they have to be free to make their own goals and dreams, and to realize their own destinies." ■

Linda Sinclair is a freelance writer from Denver, Colorado and parent of a highly gifted child.

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ADOLESCENTS

GAINING INTIMACY AS A TALENTED ADOLESCENT: A Primer for Parents
Dr. Thomas Buescher

PROFILES OF CREATIVE ADOLESCENTS
Dr. Jane Piirto

Undertake something that is difficult; it will do you good. Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow.

— Ronald E. Osborn —

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Volume 2, Issue 3

Gaining Intimacy as a Talented Adolescent:

A Primer for Parents

Thomas M. Buescher, Ph.D.

"The desire for intimacy is on the increase in American society, but our capacity to fill those desires is declining. Some research has demonstrated that divorce and loneliness are intergenerationally transmitted, meaning that the deficiencies in intimacy we experience today might be perpetuated through our children in the future." (Perlman and Fehr, 1987, p. 20)

Developmental Priorities

Adolescence is about separation and intimacy – conflictual experiences and feelings. The struggles to break free of the family, establish oneself as an adult, and embark on a productive career all have the quest for intimacy as a common denominator. Too often we mistake an adolescent's early pursuit of sexual closeness for the gaining of mature intimacy. That can be a grave error. Even teenagers who marry early seldom achieve a sense of closeness and intimacy until later in their twenties; most become disillusioned since no relationship achieves the intensity and intimacy they expected as adolescents. *(Continued on page 7)*

FOCUS ON:

ADOLESCENTS

The Hidden Gifted Learner
Suzanne Perry 3

Parenting the Gifted
Elizabeth Meckstroth 4

Instructional Strategies
Joyce VanTassel-Baska .. 5

The Reading Room
Stephanie Tolan 6

The Highly Gifted
Kathi Kearney 14

Personality Plus
Linda Silverman 15

Bright Beginnings
Martha Morelock 16

Creative Ventures and Encounters
Jerry Flack 17

Current Developments in Gifted Education
Dorothy Knopper 18

From Parent to Parent
Linda Sinclair 19

Profiles of Creative Adolescents

Jane Piirto, Ph.D.

Female Visual Artist

CATHY, a quiet 15-year-old, has a glance that shunts away when you look at her directly. She is tall and slim and dresses like any other 15-year-old in the summer – in t-shirts and shorts. She is studying printmaking at a special Governor's Summer Institute for the visual and performing arts, creativity, and writing. Cathy has come on a full scholarship provided by an anonymous donor from her home city, a major urban area. Her letter of reference from her art teacher said that Cathy has already won several art awards and is among the most talented students this teacher has seen.

Her mother didn't finish college and works as a server. Cathy doesn't know or care where her father is. Her father, a Vietnam veteran, abused her mother, her, and her three older siblings to the point that her mother gathered the children one night and fled. A religious fanatic and substance-abuser, he would not allow the children to participate in any extracurricular activities at school, "but he couldn't do anything about my art, because art is done in school, and I would always *(Continued on page 10)*

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the Wonderful World of Adolescence!

Adolescence is the most feared stage in the life cycle. Parents of the gifted start worrying about approaching adolescence when their children are still in the primary grades. Some of this premature concern is warranted by the fact that gifted children enter adolescence earlier than their peers. Leta Hollingworth noted that religious, moral, sexual and existential questions arise when children reach the **mental age** of 12. This means that a gifted child may start to experience adolescent conflicts at around the age of 9, and an extraordinarily gifted child could begin to experience these conflicts as early as 6! (Those of you who scoff at this notion haven't lived with an extraordinarily precocious child!)

Many gifted children even develop physically at an earlier rate than their peers: the onset of puberty is frequently 9 or 10. This developmental dyssynchrony often leads to some rather strange pre-adolescent situations. For example, a child may display a great deal of intellectual curiosity about sexuality – asking endless questions – without much comprehension of the answers because of physical immaturity. International issues, historical events, and Bible stories can all be frightening for a searching adolescent mind in a pre-adolescent's body, one with limited experience.

Before you give your pre-teen away, let me share the good news. Despite the myths, adolescents adopt the values and attitudes of their families. Less than 3 percent of teenage boys and less than 1 percent of girls get into trouble. Although peer pressure is enormous during the teen years, gifted adolescents tend to think for themselves rather than be crowd followers. They may go along with the group on superficial matters, but when it comes to something important – like morality, values or basic decisions about their future – they are more likely to follow the models set by their families.

The secret of raising teens is **respect**. If they feel listened to, they will listen. If they feel emotionally supported, they will cherish you throughout their adolescence. They only rebel when there is something to rebel against.

So do not expect a "rebellious" teen-ager. Greet these years with the joy of watching your children grow into independent young adults, and be confident that all of the lessons they have learned at home, both by word and example, will serve them well.

Linda Silverman

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Suzanne M. Perry

HE HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

The Young Gifted Child (Part II)

Parents are children's first teachers. Home activities that stimulate the young gifted child's thinking skills will help that (sometimes) hidden gifted learner capitalize on strengths. What follows is a variety of home activities to help parents get started.

String a Necklace

Thinking Skills Used: Patterns

Approximate Time: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Various shapes, sizes and colors of noodles (must have holes), yarn, tape, scissors.

What You Do:

- Put your collection of noodles out on the table.
- Cut a necklace-sized length of yarn for each person making a necklace. Put a piece of tape on one end to make stringing easier.
- Talk about what makes a pattern (a sequence that repeats) and use the noodles to show examples.
- Work with your child to lay out some sample pattern sequences on the table.
- Choose the favorite pattern.
- String the pattern onto the necklace, repeating the pattern several times.

Variation for More Advanced Children: This activity may be made more challenging for more advanced children by increasing the kinds of noodles available, by using several strands for the necklace, and by coloring some of the noodles with marker designs (a pattern within a pattern).

Poison

Thinking Skill Used: Forecasting

Approximate Time: 5-10 minutes

Materials: 12 plain beans, 1 spotted (pinto) bean, plastic bag.

What You Do:

- Put 12 plain beans and one spotted "poison" bean out on the table.
- Take turns picking up beans. You can pick up one or two beans in one turn.
- Keep taking turns until someone has to pick up the poison. That person loses.

As time goes on, your child will learn to forecast or predict what moves will lead to which outcomes.

Variation for More Advanced Children: Vary the rules! Use 21 beans, permit picking up more beans at a time or use other variations that you and your child invent.

Nursery Rhyme Judgment

Thinking Skill Used: Judgment

Approximate Time: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Book of nursery rhymes (dress-up clothes are optional)

What You Do:

- Choose a nursery rhyme that has a conflict situation about which a judgment could be made.
- Possibilities: *Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater; There Was An Old Woman Who Lived In A Shoe; Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son; Georgie Porgy; Wee Willie Winkie.*
- Act out the rhyme with your child (wearing dress-up clothes, if available).
- *Ask:* Do you agree with what the main character did in the rhyme? Why or why not? What else do you feel he or she could have done? What would *your* feelings have told you to do if you were the main character?

Variation for More Advanced Children: Select news events from the newspaper instead of nursery rhymes to provide the content for your dramatic play.

Family Court

Thinking Skill Used: Decision Making

Approximate Time: 15-30 minutes

Materials: Television, questions below.

What You Do:

- Select a dramatic TV program to watch as a family that is appropriate for your child's age level.
- Assign someone to act as *recorder*.
- As you watch the program together, the recorder jots down some key decisions that are made by characters in the program.
- After the show is over, TURN OFF THE TV, and debrief with the following questions:

Decision Making Debriefing

For each decision –

- Was this the best decision this character could have made? What facts back you up? What feelings?
- What would have happened if a different choice had been made?
- What are all the things the character *could* have done?
- Based on the facts you know, as well as your feelings, what do you think the character should have done?■

More to come in next issue.

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Elizabeth Meckstroth

PARENTING

Reconciling Opposites

When you're wondering how to nurture your children through adolescence, your greatest resources may be your own inner wisdom as well as your teen's ideas, feelings and insights.

In many ways, young children idealize their parents; they fill their parents' needs. Adolescents, however, have lived long enough to dilute their idealization of their parents. As children get bigger, parents tend to get smaller. Conflicts begin when adolescents grow in different ways than we expect.

In living with gifted adolescents, sometimes your task seems to be to understand the impossible! These children are usually acutely aware of many manifestations, nuances, and possibilities at once and you may be reckoning with contradictions.

Perhaps they can be understood as concurrently living multiple lives, having multiple selves, and being multiple ages.

Their astute perceptions and vivid imagination often result in cynicism. Some gifted adolescents recognize that their humor is their survival resource, their way to reconcile unfairness and contradictions. In humor, they can simultaneously accept divergent views. In humor, the impossible is attained and every aspect of life can coexist. Humor is a socially acceptable way of expressing their ability to see all sides of a situation.

Although there are no universal prescriptions, here are some ways that might help your children to believe in and enjoy themselves:

- Give them responsibilities; these are opportunities to feel that they are making their own choices from their own sense of responsibility and self-worth.
- Harness their sense of internal control by offering choices within defined and mutually understood limits.
- Allow them to learn from the experiences they choose. *(Better to learn from their experiences when they are in the shelter of your home, than later!)*
- Be that **Special Someone** in their lives who brings out their best selves.

Can you think of someone who brings out the best in you? Someone who seems to draw out the real you? How does your own "bringing-out-my-best-someone" relate to you?

- Do you feel like you are in a safe place?
- Can you express your anger and other not so nice feelings and thoughts without fear of disdain or scorn?
- When you tell your ideas, is your someone more like a bridge or a wall?
- Can you both laugh at yourselves?
- Are your feelings accepted and resonated?
- Do you respect what this person is, thinks, does?
- Do you want to cooperate with and support this person?
- What have you learned from this special relationship that will help you bring out the best in your children?

Consulting your own life experience can be your best guide to supporting your son or daughter through the struggles of adolescence. ■

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INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Joyce VanTassel-Baska

The Fine Art of Discussion (Part II)

In the last issue, we considered the focus of discussion, the appropriate levels of complexity, and the types of questions that stimulate higher level thinking (e.g., factual, interpretive, divergent, evaluative). There are several models for organizing discussions. One we mentioned in the previous issue involved: observing, comparing, classifying, hypothesizing, organizing, summarizing and evaluating. This column introduces some additional schemes.

Prepackaged discussion programs can be of value in the classroom. Programs such as **Junior Great Books, The Good Books Program,** and **Philosophy for Children** all provide high level reading selections with key questioning approaches that might be used to stimulate good discussions. Additionally, I find it useful for teachers to prepare question clusters based on their reading of a simple book at the primary level. An example of a question cluster for a marvelous African folktale, called *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain,* by Verna Aardema (1981) follows. The model used is an adaption of part of J.P. Guilford's Structure-of-Intellect Model (1967).

Memory/Cognition

What caused the grass to turn brown?

What are some of the other things that happened as a result of no rain?

What did Kipat look like when he stood on one leg?

Convergent

Why might this story have been created?

How does this story show the relationship of cause and effect in nature?

What other stories have you read that show this relationship?

Divergent

Why did Kipat think of using a feather to make it rain?

What else might he have done to cause the rain?

What would have happened if it didn't rain?

Evaluative

In your opinion, was Kipat adequately rewarded?

Did you like the way the author used rhyme to tell the story? Why?

In your opinion what is the best part of the story? Why?

Finally, good discussions with gifted learners promote feeling as well as thinking by getting students to empathize with a character's situation or take on a role of a particular character or respond to a scene in the book at a feeling level. As Robert Coles (1989) has said about the importance of books in our lives:

> *Its indirections become ours. Its energy invites our own energetic leap into sadness, delight, resentment, frustration. Psychiatrists use words such as empathy, identification, introspection. The whole point of stories is not "solutions" or "resolutions" but a broadening and even a heightening of our struggles – with new protagonists and antagonists introduced, with new sources of concern or apprehension or hope, as one's mental life accommodates itself to a series of arrivals: guests who have a way of staying but not necessarily staying put. (p. 129)*

Thus, the discussion of worthy books enhances both the cognitive and affective functions of gifted learners in growth-producing ways. ■

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Stephanie S. Tolan

HE READING ROOM

Welcome. This visit, we're going to discuss only one book – *Children of the Atom*, by Wilmar H. Shiras.

We've mentioned before that Reading Room selections may be out of print and difficult to find. That is especially true of this book, which was originally published in 1953 by Pennyfarthing Press. It was reissued by Doubleday, in a book club edition, and distributed through the Science Fiction Book Club.

We discuss it here, because it is worth the effort for anyone who works or lives with (or *is*) a highly gifted child. It deals with some of the most important issues extraordinarily gifted children must face, including isolation, the need to deny or hide their gifts, the negative perceptions of others, and the need to learn to interact with and genuinely value people with differing abilities.

The story line is simple. After an explosion in a nuclear plant in 1958, thirty or so infants are born to parents who later die from radiation exposure. The orphans are scattered across the country, taken in by foster parents or relatives, or adopted. At the age of thirteen one of them is brought to a school psychologist because he appears to be under emotional strain. The psychologist gradually learns that the boy has an intelligence far beyond measuring. His emotional strain comes from having hidden his abilities to get along with other people.

In fact, he has a complex, hidden existence. Though still in grade school he has mastered many fields by reading and taking college correspondence courses, and has published learned papers and novels and patented inventions under several pseudonyms. The boy and the doctor search out the other orphans and discover that all are equally far beyond normal intellectual ranges, though they differ in interests, personalities, coping strategies, etc. (One has been institutionalized for most of her childhood.) A "school for the gifted" is founded and, under this disguise, the far-beyond-gifted children are gathered together.

They thrive in each other's company and not only continue their individual work, but plan to combine their interests and abilities to organize all human knowledge. In addition, they help each other to become more caring, fully rounded human beings. All goes well until a maverick preacher accuses them of being monsters, "children of the atom," plotting to take over the world. His followers threaten the school.

Though they are able to defuse the immediate threat of attack, the children realize that their work and their very existence might be jeopardized by the misunderstanding of the rest of the world. They decide that though they'll continue to live together and will work together in the summers, they will disperse and return to "regular schools" so that they can interact with others, learn about others, and allow those others to learn about them. They will "join the human race."

Readers may speculate about the age and identity of the author, who apparently knew the work of Leta Hollingworth (especially *Children Above 180 IQ*) and probably used a pseudonym (as do all the children in the book). Though not referred to directly, Hollingworth's ideas and observations are the foundation of the story, and her vocabulary pervades the book. The story only thinly disguises its subject, the highly gifted. In many ways it is oversimplified and seems curiously juvenile in spite of the profundity of some of the characters' discussions. However, it cries out to be read and (more importantly) discussed by all of those for whom the life issues of extreme intelligence are central. Those issues haven't changed.

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Stephanie Tolan, from Waterford, New York, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child.*

Outstanding talent in academic or artistic endeavors provides no inoculation to the consuming pursuit of intimacy during adolescence. Erik Erikson (1963) aptly noted that the desire for intimacy is the real cap-stone of development for every adol-escent. Having high intelligence or remarkable talent and creativity as a dancer or musician does not secure the goal more easily, nor does it diminish its priority in the course of life. Teenagers can unwittingly become adolescent parents whether their grades are D's or A's, their SAT scores forgettable or remarkable, their goals the local supermarket or the Ivy League.

Few studies of gifted adolescents take note of the number of teenage pregnancies that short-circuited the pursuit of talent development before the age of 20 or 25. One survey of 500 academically talented 19 year olds, conducted at the Center for Talent Development, Northwestern University, document-ed that nearly two percent of the subjects had already discontinued college plans because of unplanned premarital pregnancy.

Among those surveyed, the use of birth control planning by those who were sexually active was the same as that recorded in the general adolescent population, about 30 percent. Nearly 70 percent of the sexually active older adolescents we contacted were taking no precautions to delay accidental pregnancies. Despite their intelligence they simply ran the risk. For some of these young people, attaining intimacy is more important than their college education or landing a fulfilling position in a coveted career. Such is the potency of the desire for intimacy. It seems further intensified in families who experience separation, divorce, or eventual blending prior to or during the adolescent years of their children.

Our knowledge about talented adolescents is still limited. Intimacy, sexuality, and early parenting among bright adolescents is deep, uncharted water. No wonder parents feel wary about observing, understanding, or supporting the necessary quest for intimacy these children undertake.

INTIMACY: THEORY AND REALITY

The search for intimacy is part of the human spirit. It seems to be woven into the fabric of children from the outset. Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) and Erik Erikson (1963) – noteworthy psychologists who favored a notion of the human family as a system of caring – believed that the bonding and attachment children feel with their parents are deep tap roots. These roots promote an ability to be separate from, but connected to, the family and significant others during childhood and adolescence. They suggested that young people acquire both "self love" and "other love" by enjoying the experience of being bonded to their parents.

Perlman and Fehr (1987), writing nearly three decades later, cast the pursuit of intimacy in a more deterministic way: intimacy is predicted by the success of earlier attachments and separations. Gaining intimacy as an adolescent is directly linked to previous experiences of being separate but connected.

> ***...the capacity for intimacy in a relationship is marked by the appearance of certain cues: mutual caring, emotional closeness, eroticism, and deep trust.***

In Perlman and Fehr's framework, intimacy includes four distinguishable features: having a stable sense of self-identity; openly sharing private thoughts, dreams, and beliefs; not experiencing interpersonal distance, like resentment or rejection; and having sexuality serve as an expression of affection as well as commitment.

In normal, healthy adolescents, the quest for intimacy follows on the heels of the successful separation and identity-forming period around age 16. This marks a second separation period, toddlerhood being the first. It is not uncommon for this separation process to stir up some of the older, primitive fears of becoming lost or disconnected from the family (Buescher, 1989). About this time most adolescents seem to be *pushed* toward further differentiation as caring young adults outside the family while also being seductively *pulled* back into the comfortable orbit of attachment to known, loving persons. Parents quickly notice the classic adolescent compromise solution: "falling in love" with a manipulative character no one can tolerate! These early attachments tend to be mercifully brief. Whatever glue is necessary for mature intimacy is missing. Before long, strong defenses and a sense of self-confidence rise up to protect a son or daughter's ego. Most phantom lovers drop by the wayside between the ages of 16 and 19.

In real life the capacity for intimacy in a relationship is marked by the appearance of certain cues: mutual caring, emotional closeness, eroticism, and deep trust. While Erikson (1963) felt that an adolescent could not gain intimacy in a relationship until his or her ego identity or self awareness had been shaped (about age 22), more recent writers disagree. Sarrell and Sarrell (1981) and Calderone and Johnson (1983) imagine both processes, ego identity and intimacy, as closely related, intertwined spirals where bonding, sexual experiences, and caring relationships work together to collaboratively promote mature intimacy.

Gaining intimacy is slowly titrated from small but always successful experiences of trust, sharing, fantasizing, and exploring one's own sexual capacities with a caring 'other.' If there is any *(Continued on page 8)*

push toward pairing in the march to ego identity for an adolescent, it is one of limited necessity. Social experimentation with a wide variety of partners is *not* the norm. Instead, adolescents seem to work within a narrow band of options – testing, exploring, and evaluating new-found sexual feelings with partners who demon-strate not only safety but also 'promise' as a permanent companion. Not surprisingly, most talented adolescents appear to gravitate toward equally bright peers whose interests seem to complement rather than threaten their talents. Intimate friends are not competitors.

MILESTONES TOWARD INTIMACY

Close, intimate relationships between boys and girls normally appear by late adolescence, ages 17 to 22. They develop gradually but with a steady momentum. There are some predictable milestones. Perlman and Fehr (1987), summarizing various research studies, suggest one possible sequence:

(1) More frequent, more time-consuming, and more varied contacts;

(2) the development of personal communication 'codes,' ways of telling each other important thoughts or feelings;

(3) anticipation of the partner's views, thoughts, and behaviors;

(4) increasing interdependence, a sense of "We" rather than "Me";

(5) heightened sensitivity about the other's well-being;

(6) increased feelings of trust and commitment;

(7) overt reactions to separations that facilitate restored closeness; and

(8) *both* partners viewing the relationship as irreplaceable.

To the practiced eye of a parent or professional, few adolescent relationships achieve the full level of intimacy suggested here. Most are approximations. If either partner's needs cannot be met or trust gained, the relationship rapidly deflates.

COMPLICATIONS

Numerous complications can sabotage the quest for intimacy during adolescence. Four are frequently cited: early sexual behavior; health complications (especially sexually transmitted diseases); premarital pregnancy; and failed early marriage (Elster and McAnarney, 1979). Each event can undermine self-esteem and trust. Often the ripples of self-doubt from unsatisfying relationships are not detected until the end of adolescence when adulthood seems to be elusive and postponed.

When adolescents have difficulty gaining intimacy, and turn to premature sexual behavior as a last resort, support is necessary to turn the pattern around. Several issues cloud the horizon and frustrate parents or professionals intent on restoring teens to emotional health.

...most talented adolescents appear to gravitate toward equally bright peers...

Scarred Relationships. Unsuccessful sexual encounters during adolescence have a powerful impact on the ability to form intimate relationships later in life. The effects of unresolved losses – the loss of virginity, loss of friendships, or the loss of a carefree adolescence created by sexual intercourse – are easily recognized. Adolescents might appear lonely, depressed, directionless, and without confidence to pursue further relationships. Many teenagers say that sex seems to distance them from committed, reciprocal relationships.

Ambivalence. While two adolescents might genuinely enjoy the time they spend with each other, they often feel they are sacrificing the opportunity to experience more of life's adventures and potential partners. The frequent dramatic, passionate splits and reunions parents notice about adolescent dating and bonding can be due to intense ambivalence between young people. In some cases, unprotected intercourse at these reunions produces an unwanted pregnancy, ending the unbearable ambivalence, and forcing the couple to either consolidate or break apart permanently. The fear of being alone keeps ambivalent teenage couples together.

Masked Anger. Adolescent couples often experience anger, usually masked by visible depression and withdrawal. Sometimes the anger is linked to conflicts with parents; it also can be focused at oneself or the other partner. The anger might be connected to deep feelings of loss of control when one adolescent feels trapped in a dead-end relationship with another. The feelings can reflect ongoing conflict about older 'unmourned' separations and unsuccessful attachments. Whatever the source of the conflict, adolescents usually have considerable trouble resolving the anger. If they give in to their defenses of projection and isolation, then they are likely to cover themselves with a blanket of depression.

Unavailable Empathy. Adolescent partners often complain to parents and confidants about uncaring and ineffective communication between them. More often than not, these can be traced to lack of maturity, a heavy dose of narcissism, and a history of esteem and communication problems in the families of each partner. Without stores of empathy, it is difficult to look beyond one's own hurts and needs and see the 'other' as primary. Adolescents appear to be constitutionally self-centered and that works against restoring broken relationships. *(Continued on page 9)*

BEING A PARENT THROUGH IT ALL

Parents of talented older adolescents usually approach this period of unfolding sexual identity and intimacy with fear and trembling. Their reluctance to tackle thorny issues might be linked to more than age or wariness. Perhaps it flows from a kind of denial that their son or daughter could harbor sexual feelings or want to seek intimacy with others beyond the family. Most parents from time to time experience denial along these lines.

It pays to keep each adolescent's quest for intimacy in a larger perspective. Sexual unfolding, identity seeking, and gaining intimacy are normal priorities for adolescents moving into adulthood. Even though parents of talented youngsters can accept that precept, they generally have some uneasy feelings about it. Why? Some possible explanations might be considered.

First, adolescence stirs up good and bad memories in every parent. Perhaps it highlights brilliant successes or painful inadequacies in one's own adolescent passage. Or maybe it underscores feelings about failing as a present-day parent. It should not be surprising that feelings like these influence thoughts and perceptions, urging parents to act protectively and decisively – even when it is not in the best interests of a young man or woman.

I have heard parents in my office angrily confront a sullen 20 year-old daughter: "Don't even think about getting involved with HIM until your degree is final and the paychecks are coming in!" Time-worn advice that might make you smile now, but serious business when a daughter is threatening to leave school. Perhaps that angry caveat was cloaked with the knowledge of how difficult it is to nurture an intimate relationship in the frenzy of college or graduate school. Maybe it was rooted in personal experiences that parents still regret?

Second, parents and family members can be jealous about the developing talents of another member. They seem to quickly "circle the wagons" if a prospective intimate partner appears to threaten their cohesiveness – the unity that might be forged around an adolescent's talents. Knowingly or not, all family members may have sacrificed a part of themselves, their resources and opportunities, even their experiences, for the sake of developing THAT member's potential.

Possessive feelings are not uncommon for siblings as well as parents. One young woman recently reported to me that her married brother and sister have been unreasonably protective of her talents. I suspect they also have a lot invested in keeping their youngest sister as the "family baby." She said they greet potential boyfriends with steeled eyes and chilly welcomes. "My older brother told one of my guys: 'You'd better look for someone else to do your laundry. My little sister has bigger dreams than you!'" Her anger and resentment at this attitude brought her to the brink of simply walking away from the pursuit of a promising theatrical career as a way of showing family members her own strong will.

HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

Gaining intimacy is an unmistakable milestone in the march toward extending the family. Just as the family has the task of providing early linkages for its children to the outside world, it must also facilitate their eventual separation. When young people reach out for intimate contact during late adolescence, it is not a sign of family disintegration. It is a surge of healthy growth. I have found that when families of gifted young people can capture the realization that a son or daughter's pursuit of intimacy is a necessary component of the process of developing both personality and talent, relationships become more relaxed. Intimacy does nurture creativity and excellence.

The key task for parents at this point is to guarantee that deep, emotional connections are not severed as a young person embarks on a separate life path. The greater danger is that a talented young person's reluctance to be "reigned in" by the family could escalate a large-scale rebellion where talents and bonds are BOTH lost. Gifted adolescents need to feel the firmness of the family beneath their feet as they cross the bridge to explore intimate relationships. It helps them to know that their parents, too, struggle with the developmental dilemma of being "separate but connected" – and that its eventual resolution provides strength for all. ■

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go to the art room on my extra periods." After they left, he cruised the neighborhood in a vehicle with guns in it, and banged on their door late at night.

She continues, "When he would be yelling and hitting, I would just go into my room and throw myself on the bed and pray to God for awhile, and God would fill me with a good feeling, and I would do art." She regrets that her older brother had to leave all his art work behind when they fled that Christmas night, "so he can never get it back." Cathy was younger, and hadn't done that much that she wanted to save. "I have all my work at my aunt's, where we're living now, and I take it out and look at it when I'm alone." She derives great pleasure from her art.

She knew early on that she had talent; she was the girl other children asked to draw horses and pictures of pretty people. For the final show, she displays a series of patterned prints, impeccably done. Her summer teacher says they're of the highest quality, "almost as if she were a senior in college majoring in art." A local collector approaches her to buy one, and she reluctantly sells the smallest.

Her other pleasures include walking in the woods with her two best friends, and talking about the meaning of life, "getting deep, you know?" She says they talk for hours, sitting on a rock in a stream in a park. Her future plans include going to college in art, if they can afford it. Her greatest fear, though, is that she will turn out to be an abusive person like her father, "because it runs in families." She has already seen signs of aggressiveness and violence in two of her older siblings.

Though shy, Cathy has found herself a few special friends among the other girls in the dorm. Her gentle nature and her skittish good looks attract boys to her during the Institute. After our interview, she does not talk to me again, though I see her looking at me. Sometimes she smiles.

FEMALE CREATIVE WRITER/MUSICIAN

During a Christmas party when TIFFANY was two, she climbed up on the piano bench of a family friend's baby grand and began picking out the tune of "Silent Night." The party stopped in awe of what she was doing. The family friend told her mother that if Tiffany took piano lessons, the baby grand would be hers on her sixteenth birthday. Tiffany, now 15, has one more year to go. She's been taking lessons for 13 years.

But she's not at this summer institute for the music component; she's here in creative writing, for she also writes poetry and stories and essays. She's a cheerleader, in the band, a class officer, gets all A's, and her family is the most prominent in her home town. Her mother works full time in real estate. Tiffany dresses in preppy style. Among the sounds that lull her to sleep is the sound of their swimming pool motor.

This summer she's been to two other institutes, one in video and one in feminism. During this institute's final production, a performance for parents, she reads a nonfiction essay on women's rights. After this institute, she's going on a church retreat to the Adirondacks. She's recently "accepted Christ." Before she went to a meeting of her Episcopal youth group, she thought that religion was a "bunch of baloney." While there, however, she experienced "sweet certainty that Jesus was there."

Tiffany spends her most pleasurable times with her boyfriend, the son of her family's old friends, whom she has known "since birth, but we just started going out last year." She also enjoys riding her horse. "But my little sister is riding him and taking care of him more, now, since I'm so busy with my other interests."

There is a rule in her school that freshmen cannot go to the prom. But Tiffany took it in stride – she designed and sewed prom gowns for three of her older friends. "They were nice. I looked in magazines and just designed them." She often does things like that, she says with an infectious giggle. "People call me a fluff chick, but I do a lot of thinking, too. I just like to do a lot of different things. And I do them pretty well."

When asked what she plans to do in the future, Tiffany says she'll go to college, of course. "But after college, I'll probably be the one in the station wagon with all the kids."

MALE VISUAL ARTIST

Wherever Tommy, 17, goes, all eyes go with him – for he wears his reddish hair in a Mohawk that is five inches high. His fair bald scalp gleams, and his Mohawk is stuck out with the strongest mousse available. His art teacher at a technical school writes, "Tommy is the most talented student I have had in years." He is studying printmaking and is minoring in creative writing, even though he does not consider himself poetic. "The words just don't come. I'm always struggling with words. The feelings come. The pictures come. But not words or poems."

Tommy has been through many changes in his childhood: his parents have been divorced, he has moved at least six times, he has been sickly, and has had mono twice. He has "basically screwed up the school thing," and is entering his junior year a year late, because he had substance abuse problems a couple of years ago.

He was in gifted programs in junior high school and he has been keeping sketchbooks since he was eight. But he didn't like the structured way his high school art teacher taught so he flunked his first year of art in high school. *(Continued on page 11)*

His mother, a former high school English teacher, is very supportive of his art work and willingly buys him new supplies. He wants to study to be a commercial artist, "to support my fine art."

He's also involved in theatre through his brother because he likes the people. Tommy has sung in two rock bands. His type of music talks of "politics, the state of the world, personal changing, and changes in the world." He has a small business painting people's leather jackets, and works as a cook in a restaurant.

Tommy wears t-shirts from his favorite rock bands or with designs that he makes. His jeans have artfully placed frayed holes. He wears combat boots, leather jackets, chains, and has both ears pierced, which makes people "think I'm gay or something, and I just tell them I ran out of space on my left ear." He has a "weird feeling I'm always being watched," (he's probably right) and he calls himself overly imaginative.

He says about his look that, "If people actually knew me, they wouldn't have that much of a problem with me, how I look. My look gets people to notice me. If I look real open and approachable, I look interesting enough for people to come up to me and talk to me. It's one way of weeding out the ignorant."

Tommy's favorite animal is the bat. He hates the sunshine and calls himself nocturnal, staying up during the summer, breaking curfew until 7 a.m., and sleeping until 5 or 6 p.m.. When he gets up he has a breakfast of lukewarm tea and an apple.

When he's nervous or upset or wants to think, Tommy sketches for a couple of hours, and gets calmed down. He attributes his creativity to the various events that have happened to him. "They have really forced me to look within myself for something that was there – the strength to get through – and I'm finding it." He has a wide circle of 20 close friends, and he likes to think a lot, reading about 6 books a month. Science fiction, psychology, and fantasy are his favorites. He wonders about the meaning of life, and loves to sit and think about life's meaning, though he doesn't call himself religious.

For the final art show, his prints show bold graphics of fantastical landscapes intertwined with macabre symbols. He sells one to a faculty member.

MALE CREATIVE WRITER/MUSICIAN

RANDY, 15, is a creative writer. He has been in gifted programs in all the schools he went to. His father is involved in biology, and his mother is in finance. His family is very supportive of his work, and gives him feedback – especially his mother, who discusses his poetry and stories with him. When he was in preschool, his mother read to him every day. In kindergarten, his teacher let him read stories to the rest of the children.

Reading has been his greatest source of pleasure throughout his life. When he is reading a good book, he may talk out loud to the characters, warning them of perils to come. His favorite books are science fiction and fantasy. Beautiful language gets his mind going. He admires Edgar Allen Poe, and often reads a poem and gets inspired. When he does his homework, which is often boring, he will "zip back and forth" between the books he is reading for pleasure and his homework.

At least one of their parents is supportive of their creativity.

When he is writing a story, he will go out to the woods and imagine that he is the character he is writing about. He cannot visualize – mentally photograph – "hardly at all," he says, though he doesn't feel that's a handicap to a writer. "I am a poet," he says. "I am the one who seeks the truth. I like to imagine that I have some power in creating the truth." In writing, he often imitates forms in poetry. He doesn't like poetry that's "just there. I like to think when I read poetry."

He also likes to think about the presence of a Supreme Being. Not that he's a believer, but since so many people do believe and get some comfort from it, he wonders whether there's anything to it, even though he can't see it logically.

He does not like to stand out by his appearance; that's what he notices first about people and he doesn't want people to do that to him. He dresses in t-shirts and jeans, and says, "I would hate to be defined by how I look. People will get past appearances quicker if there's nothing to look at." He has a small group of friends at school, and says "none of my friends would ever guess how I act when I read my books."

When he was in first and second grade, he used to get headaches because people were always asking him for help. "There was a huge barrage of my name being constantly thrown at me." People still ask him for help in their schoolwork, but he just gives it to them now and doesn't worry about it.

Randy is also a musician, and accompanies groups in school once in awhile. "I don't like to play for other people," he says. "I like to play for myself. My grandmother likes it when I play. She tries to possess it. She thinks I'm playing for her. But I'm not. I don't like to give it away, and when I listen to music, I don't like to listen to instrumental music, I like to listen to music with words I can think about. When I play, I play things that are fast or complicated. Bach is the best."

Randy and another poet did a joint reading at the final performance of a poem with *(Continued on page 12)*

two voices. Then Randy played jazz piano while the other poet read a beat poem.

These four creatively gifted adolescents were part of a group of 50, from 30 cities in all geographic areas of Ohio. The OverExcitability Questionnaire (Piechowski and Cunningham, 1985), was administered to 30 of the students aged 15 and above. Taped interviews were conducted with 20 of them. The OverExcitability Questionnaire, derived from Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration, measures the strength of five "overexcitabilities": emotional, intellectual, psychomotor, imaginational, and sensual. These, combined with a high IQ, may help to describe the various types of gifted individuals. The quotations in this article are from the interviews.

The group was also administered the *Myers Briggs Type Inventory* (MBTI) (Myers, 1980). The MBTI is based on Jung's theory of personality, and has been the most used in research on learning style and personality type. Ninety-five percent of the students, and all of the faculty, were iNtuitive (N)/Perceptive (P) types, with Extraversion and Introversion equally divided. More of the adolescents had preferences for Feeling (F) rather than Thinking (T). There were no obvious sex differences in the distribution of Feeling and Thinking types.

One can also notice from these profiles other traits that are perhaps common to creatively gifted adolescents.

- A significant number of them have undergone major changes in their young lives, including divorce, abuse (both physical and substance), frequent moving, illness. MacKinnon (1977) points out that something has happened in the childhood of the person who becomes a "creative." Guilford (1977) indicates that creative people have had some trauma in their childhoods. Perhaps creative expression and the need for it is an attempt to seek equilibrium, "normality," to make sense out of life (Piirto, in press).
- These creative adolescents have rich interior lives that often extend to strong fantasy and animism. Boys reported hearing their name called when no one is there, and imaginary playmates were common among girls.
- Their participation in the arts is more than perfunctory. They often started very early in their art.
- They are often good in more than one of the arts.
- They are direct in their speech, and are not afraid to challenge authority.
- At least one of their parents is supportive of their creativity.
- They think about spiritual matters.
- They may dress unconventionally or conventionally. They may have wide circles of friends, or a few special friends. They may or may not do well in school subjects.

From these brief profiles, it can be seen that Randy and Tiffany are the most "typical" gifted children, coming from intact homes, having had a long and successful participation in gifted programs in their schools. Both are also talented musicians, recognized for their talent, but they chose to study creative writing. They are multi-talented.

Cathy and Tommy are not "typical" of intellectually gifted students. They are children of divorce, with various kinds of abuse in their lives. Both say they have strong visualization capabilities, and *feel that their involvement in their visual art has somehow rescued them*. In fact, the creative work having an aspect of "rescue" is also apparent in Randy's writing, and in Tiffany's essay on feminism. To none of these adolescents is their involvement in their creative pursuits merely "homework." They are already deeply committed. ■

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How To Nurture Creativity (Navarre, 1979)

- Provide a private place for creative work to be done.
- Provide materials *(e.g. musical instruments, sketchbooks)*.
- Encourage and display children's creative work, but do not overly evaluate it.
- Do your own creative work, and let the children see you doing it.
- Value the creative work of others *(e.g., attend museums, theatre, movies, talk about books)*.
- Do not emphasize sex-role stereotypes.
- Provide private lessons.
- Use hardships as opportunities to encourage children to express themselves through the arts.
- Emphasize that talent is only a small part of creative production and that discipline and practice are important.
- Allow children to be "odd"; do not emphasize socialization at the expense of creative expression.

INDEX

The following index has been compiled for Volume I, Issues 1-6 of Understanding Our Gifted to assist you in locating information on specific topics.

Abstract thought *(5)* 15
Acceleration *(1)* 13; *(3)* 1, 8, 9, 10, 23; *(4)* 13, 19; *(5)* 7, 8, 9, 13; *(6)* 13
Active learning *(1)* 5
Adolescence *(1)* 12; *(4)* 13, 14, 15; *(5)* 6, 14; *(6)* 16, 17
Advanced development *(1)* 2, 7, 10, 11, 13; *(2)* 5, 8, 9, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20; *(3)* 2; *(4)* 19; *(5)* 1, 7, 8, 9, 15; *(6)* 18
Anastasia Krupnick *(2)* 7
Appreciation *(4)* 4
Assessment (Testing) *(2)* 14, 18, 20; *(3)* 5; *(5)* 4, 7
At-risk students *(1)* 3; *(6)* 18
Auditory sequencing *(4)* 8
Autonomous learner *(4)* 10, 11, 12
Backpacking *(3)* 19
The "Bagthorpes" *(1)* 6
Bibliotherapy *(4)* 5
Birthday Time Capsules *(1)* 17
Brainstorming *(1)* 5, 17; *(3)* 18
Calendars and Catalogs *(2)* 19, 21
Cartoons *(1)* 8, 14; *(2)* 20, 22; *(3)* 11, 22; *(4)* 4; *(5)* 12; *(6)* 16
The Catalogue of the Universe *(6)* 6
Challenging *(2)* 1, 12; *(4)* 9
Characteristics *(1)* 8, 13; *(2)* 5, 16, 17; *(4)* 1, 7, 10, 11; *(5)* 1, 2, 7
Children's literature *(1)* 6; *(2)* 7; *(3)* 7; *(4)* 6; *(5)* 6; *(6)* 5, 6
Cinderella Complex *(6)* 3
Cognitive style *(1)* 5; *(4)* 1, 7, 8, 9, 16
Cooperative learning *(5)* 5
Community *(3)* 17, 20; *(6)* 8
Counseling *(1)* 8, 15; *(2)* 11; *(4)* 4, 9, 14, 15; *(5)* 3, 14
Courage *(5)* 1
Creativity *(1)* 14, 17; *(2)* 16, 19, 21; *(3)* 18, 19; *(4)* 17, 18; *(5)* 16, 17; *(6)* 15
Criticism *(1)* 9, 10
Culturally diverse *(1)* 3
Current issues *(1)* 18; *(2)* 22; *(3)* 22; *(4)* 18; *(5)* 18; *(6)* 18
Definition *(1)* 2
Delinquency *(4)* 3
Dorp Dead *(3)* 7
Early childhood *(1)* 1, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14; *(2)* 1, 5, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 20; *(5)* 1, 7, 15; *(6)* 5
Early college *(3)* 9; *(4)* 13; *(5)* 13; *(6)* 13
Early entrance *(3)* 9
Early reading *(2)* 6, 8, 9, 10; *(6)* 5
Elitism *(3)* 22
Empathy *(6)* 1, 7
Ethics *(6)* 1, 8
Emotional adjustment/development *(1)* 1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16
Enrichment classes *(5)* 9, 16
Flexibility *(2)* 10, 15
Frustration *(1)* 8, 9, 12; *(2)* 17
Gifted girls *(1)* 3; *(4)* 14; *(6)* 3
Gifted-handicapped *(1)* 3
Gifted parents *(1)* 4, 17; *(2)* 4; *(3)* 2; *(5)* 10
Gifted programs *(1)* 11; *(2)* 10; *(4)* 18; *(5)* 18
Global awareness/education *(1)* 16; *(6)* 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10
Goal-setting *(1)* 16
(George) *(4)* 6
Grouping *(5)* 5
Hearing impaired *(2)* 3, 15
Heroes *(6)* 4
Hidden giftedness *(1)* 2, 3; *(2)* 3; *(3)* 3; *(4)* 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18; *(5)* 3
Highly gifted *(1)* 6, 7, 13, 20; *(2)* 14; *(3)* 5, 14, 17, 20, 21; *(4)* 13; *(5)* 1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15; *(6)* 13
History *(1)* 18; *(2)* 5; *(3)* 12;
Home enrichment *(1)* 14, 17, 18, 19; *(2)* 9; *(5)* 16, 17
Home/school cooperation *(2)* 2; *(3)* 4, 14, 17; *(6)* 18, 19
Homeschooling *(3)* 1, 12, 13, 15, 16, 21; *(5)* 9
Honesty *(6)* 4
Humor *(3)* 20
Identification *(2)* 5, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20; *(4)* 10, 11; *(5)* 1
Imposter syndrome *(1)* 10; *(6)* 3
Independence *(3)* 6; *(4)* 9, 12; *(5)* 14
Inquiry *(3)* 6
Instructional strategies *(1)* 5; *(2)* 6; *(3)* 6; *(4)* 5, 16; *(5)* 5
In Summer Light *(6)* 6
Intensity *(1)* 8, 9; *(6)* 14
Interdependence *(6)* 1, 7, 8, 9
Introversion *(2)* 11; *(3)* 17
Junior Great Books *(2)* 6; *(6)* 5
Late bloomers *(4)* 8
Learning *(1)* 15; *(2)* 8
Learning centers *(5)* 5
Learning styles *(4)* 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16
Learning-disabled/gifted *(1)* 3; *(4)* 8, 12
Legislation *(2)* 21, 22
Listening *(1)* 4, 7, 9; *(2)* 15
The Lottery Rose *(4)* 6
Modeling *(1)* 14, 15, 16; *(2)* 4, 12
Moral development *(6)* 1, 10, 11, 12
Mysteries *(5)* 16, 17
Overexcitabilities *(3)* 10, 11
Parenting *(1)* 1, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19; *(2)* 4, 5, 9, 12, 23; *(3)* 4, 5, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21; *(4)* 1, 4, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19; *(5)* 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 19, 23; *(6)* 4, 16, 17, 19
Perfectionism *(1)* 8, 9, 12, 15; *(2)* 17; *(3)* 11; *(5)* 3
Personality development/factors *(1)* 2, 8; *(2)* 20; *(3)* 11; *(4)* 4; *(6)* 14
Praise *(1)* 10, 15; *(2)* 13
Procrastination *(5)* 3
Questioning techniques *(1)* 5; *(2)* 6; *(3)* 6; *(4)* 5; *(6)* 15
Reactions to testing *(3)* 5, 17
Reading Room *(1)* 6; *(2)* 7; *(3)* 7; *(4)* 6; *(5)* 6
Relaxation techniques *(1)* 9
Resisting pressure *(1)* 9; *(4)* 9
Rules *(2)* 1, 12, 13
Self-actualization *(6)* 8, 9
Self-esteem *(1)* 4, 11, 15; *(5)* 11, 12
Self-evaluation *(1)* 8, 10, 12; *(2)* 13
Sensitivity *(1)* 7, 8, 9, 13; *(5)* 15, 19
Separation *(5)* 14; *(6)* 16
Sequential learners *(4)* 7
Siblings *(2)* 23
Social adjustment/development *(1)* 1, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15; *(3)* 15, 23; *(4)* 5; *(5)* 8, 9, 15; *(6)* 13, 19
Spatial learners *(4)* 1, 7, 8, 10
Specialization *(1)* 15
Stress *(1)* 9, 12, 15, 16; *(2)* 4; *(3)* 19; *(6)* 14
Talent Search *(3)* 10; *(5)* 9
Teaching the gifted *(1)* 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 15; *(2)* 6, 10; *(3)* 6; *(4)* 5, 10, 11, 16; *(5)* 5, 7, 8, 9, 15, 18; *(6)* 5, 9
Television *(4)* 17
Testing *(2)* 14, 18, 20; *(3)* 5; *(5)* 6, 7
A Time to Fly Free *(3)* 7
True peers *(1)* 7; *(5)* 15
Underachievement *(1)* 3, 15; *(3)* 3; *(4)* 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16
Uneven development *(1)* 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; *(2)* 8, 9, 14; *(3)* 1, 7, 8, 9, 19
Unrealistic expectations *(1)* 8, 9, 12; *(5)* 1, 11
Very Far Away from Anywhere Else *(3)* 6
Workaholism *(5)* 3
Young adult books *(3)* 6

Kathi Kearney

HE HIGHLY GIFTED

Highly Gifted Children And Their Families: Suggestions For Educators (Part II)

Educators who work with highly gifted children and their families often find themselves in uncharted territory. What are these children really like? Why are the families of these children so concerned? And how can the classroom teacher help? In the last issue, we focused on ideas for educators as they work with the families of these children. Several additional suggestions follow.

Don't believe the myths about the highly gifted. Myths concerning this population abound. Some of the most common – and most erroneous – are that acceleration causes social problems; that these children are social isolates; that they should spend all their time with chronological-age peers; and that they will not become achieving adults. On the contrary, research shows that acceleration is often beneficial, both academically and socially (Janos & Robinson, 1985); preference for social interaction depends on personality style; many highly gifted children require several sets of peers, some for intellectual activities and others for activities such as sports (Roedell, 1988); and, given appropriate educational intervention and personal support, many highly gifted children go on to make major contributions as adults.

Be flexible. Flexibility is a key ingredient for the teachers and administrators who work with extremely gifted children. It is very common to have to make *major* adjustments and interventions as the child progresses through school; a flexible school system is able to accommodate the necessary adjustments easily. In practical, concrete terms, flexibility means observing and responding to the child's advanced development as it emerges. This almost always requires a variety of educational options for the child as she progresses through school. It may also mean that bureaucratic but time-honored local or state educational policies *(such as compulsory attendance requirements, the grade in which a child is allowed to study algebra, or when a child may receive high school credit)* may occasionally need to be adapted or waived. The teacher and the school can do much to help highly gifted children and their families by remembering that flexibility in programming is an absolute necessity.

Be a support system for these families. It is very difficult for many families of highly gifted children to find the support that they need. Few organizations and parent groups work with this special population. The federal legislation that guarantees a free and appropriate education to other exceptional children does not apply to the gifted, even though their exceptionality may be every bit as great. The extra financial costs of raising an extremely gifted child start earlier and last longer (Silverman & Kearney, 1989), yet few scholarship funds are available. If the child enters college early, he or she may not even qualify for federal financial aid. And many families find, to their sadness, that they are not able to share with friends or relatives the achievements of their children, as other parents do, because the achievements are so different from the norm. Therefore, the support the school is able to offer is a critical element. Be available to talk with these families, be flexible, share articles and conference information, and be a friend.

Provide the services the child needs. Of course, every school district has budgetary limits. But as much as is within your power, try to provide the child with the services he or she needs. Many appropriate services for such children require more creativity and flexibility than money; even the most economically disadvantaged school district can allow a child to join a class of older children for instruction, or can provide alternate assignments when appropriate.

Establish a good working relationship, and keep the lines of communication open. Then you and the family can work together as a team to help these children fulfill their potential. ■

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ERSONALITY PLUS

Procrastination

As an expert procrastinator myself, I am in an excellent position to give advice on successful procrastination. Some of us are better equipped to procrastinate than others. Some of you were born right on schedule and you've been punching a time clock ever since. You have deadlines imbedded in your neurons. You find it hard to fathom how procrastinators manage to get through life at all. Well, in this column I'm going to share a few of my secrets.

But first, let's discuss some of the reasons people procrastinate. Personality type is a major factor. According to the *Myers Briggs Type Indicator* (Myers, 1962), half the American population are "Perceivers" (Ps) and half are "Judgers" (Js). Ps prefer to take in as much information as possible and postpone decision-making. Js prefer to make decisions as quickly as possible. This is a natural set up for conflict: Js create deadlines and Ps avoid them.

Children generally prefer the P mode to the J mode. It takes many years of societal conditioning to convince a child to give up play in favor of work. But there are children who are born workers. These are the Organizationally Talented. They love to plan, to accomplish tasks, to organize themselves and others, to set up schedules, to meet deadlines, and to live an orderly life. Teachers love children like this. The only problem is that they grow up to expect everybody to be like them, and become very angry at the rest of us who aren't. If only Js would realize that Organizational Talent is a gift, maybe they would try teaching it instead of simply expecting it from others.

Ps, on the other hand, are Organizationally Impaired. They wait until the very last minute to start a project. They can spend inordinate amounts of time at the library searching, reading, taking notes and collecting information before they begin written assignments. Writing is usually postponed until bedtime the night before the assignment is due, in hopes that it will all come together in the middle of the night. (Ps know that Muses only visit after midnight.)

Ps have difficulty setting priorities, turning off the multitude of ideas and possibilities that flood their minds, doing only one thing at a time, resisting distractions, meeting deadlines, and remembering what time it is. However, being a P isn't all bad: Ps are spontaneous, creative, fun loving, flexible, exciting people who deal quite well with the unexpected. They just need to "rent a J" to get things done.

So how does one learn to survive as a P? Here are some clues:

- ***Computerize your priority list.*** Make a list of things you need to do, and each day set new priorities for the use of your time. *It's fun!*
- ***Develop productive avoidance mechanisms.*** Avoid the most pressing task facing you by doing the second most important task. At least something gets done that way.
- ***Create false deadlines.*** If you know you are likely to start a project after it's due, trick yourself into thinking it is really due earlier.
- ***Allow more time.*** However long you think it will take you to complete a project, multiply that by 3.
- ***Rent a J!*** When an important project is due, ask a J to help you set up a plan to organize yourself to get it accomplished. ■

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Martha Morelock

BRIGHT BEGINNINGS:

The Young Gifted Child

A parent expressed surprise when her five-year-old son, Mark, attained an IQ score rivaling that of his highly gifted eight-year-old brother, Dan. Mark, although recognized as bright by family members, was regarded as sociable, artistic, lovable – but not "gifted." True, he was beginning to take an interest in reading, but then, his brother, Dan, had been reading fluently by the age of four and demonstrated early interest in logical games and puzzles. Their mother, surprised at her failure to recognize Mark's capabilities, also feared Mark lacked appreciation of his strengths. During a conversation about what family members would wish for if their wishes were guaranteed to come true, Mark had wistfully remarked that he would like "to be smarter."

Research suggests that what was occurring in this family is not unusual. First-born children occupy a favored position in terms of probability of being designated a "gifted child," while second-born gifted children frequently appear "non-gifted" because their achievement pattern differs from that of their elder siblings (Silverman, 1988). Linda Silverman found that among 148 sets of tested siblings, 91 (61.5%) were within 10 points of each others' IQs – in spite of the fact that few of the second-borns had been perceived as gifted by their parents prior to the assessment. In explaining these findings, she suggests that second children, born into families where an elder sibling has already carved out his or her turf as the achiever, develop personalities and abilities very different from their older brothers or sisters.

Other researchers, as well, have noted this differentiation phenomenon in families (Bank and Kahn, 1982; Rosen, 1987). Some especially intriguing dynamics have come to light regarding twins. At the University of Minnesota, Thomas Bouchard (Rosen, 1987), in his studies of identical twins reared apart, found that "highly separated" twins had similar or identical IQs 76% of the time, while, paradoxically, "little separated" twins showed only a 65% correlation. Bouchard concluded that identical twins, when reared apart, feel no pressure to differentiate and are more likely to develop in accordance with their genetic inclinations. Silverman reports cases of identical twins (reared together) getting identical IQ scores, while answering correctly completely different items.

A normal aid to identity development (Bank and Kahn, 1982), differentiation can also have undesirable effects. Mark, in the case above, perceived himself as "not smart" – perhaps because his elder brother had prior rights to the role of "the gifted child" in the family, or perhaps because Mark's demonstrated abilities were not the ones most associated by the family with giftedness. Silverman notes that in her experience, when parents learned that their second children were gifted, their attitudes toward these children changed markedly. Furthermore, family harmony increased as the younger siblings received more special attention for their abilities.

If parents and teachers are conscious of such normal family dynamics, they can be more effective facilitators of children's talents and more sensitive supporters of each child's efforts to establish an individual sense of self. ■

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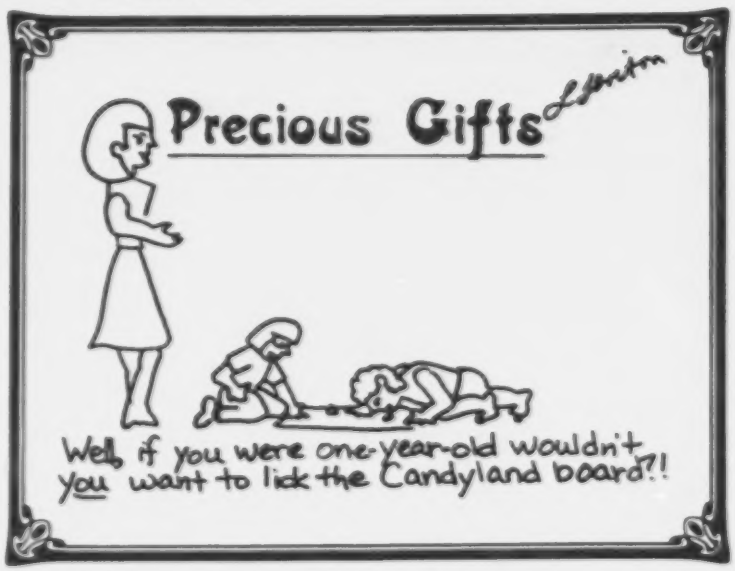

IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY

Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack
Tour Guide

This, dear friends, is a sad journey. The atmosphere is bleak and the mood is somber. A dirge is our sorrowful traveling music. The procession moves at a slow pace to the end of the journey: **The Hill of Lost Prospects**. Today we take ***Crea Tivity*** to her final resting place.

In the manner of the great movie *Citizen Kane*, let's examine a life retrospectively. Who was ***Crea Tivity*** and what pathway lead her to this sad ending?

Crea Tivity was born to loving parents. She was a very creative baby who was especially alert to the colorful and expressive stimuli that her parents provided. She demonstrated an early interest in art, and almost before she could walk or talk, she could draw. She loved all the colors of the rainbow and used them inventively in her drawings. One day Crea used her paint set to create an imaginative orchard scene. The stately green trees were loaded with ripe, plump blue apples. Just as she put the last dab of blue paint on her drawings, her older brother entered her room. Proudly, Crea offered her artwork for his inspection. His only response was, "Gee, Crea, that's a pretty dumb painting. For gosh sake, don't you know apples are *red*?" Sadly, Crea put away her paint set *and she rested.*

Soon, however, her brother's criticism was filed away and Crea resiliently went on to new adventures. Crea was reading well enough to enjoy her Dr. Seuss books on her own by age five. Then, the big day came. Crea was going to school. With enthusiasm and great anticipation, she gathered up her favorite books and marched off to her first day in kindergarten. But, her walk home from that first day in kindergarten was a slow one. She wondered to herself, "What did I do wrong?" for the nice teacher had taken her books from her and said, "Now don't be ridiculous, Crea. There is no need to bring books to school. We do not learn to read until first grade in this school." With a little disappointment and quite a bit of confusion, Crea lay down *and she rested.*

Reading was not the only subject taught in first grade. Arithmetic was also an important subject for six year-olds to study. Crea loved to count and to play counting games with her older brother and sister. She proudly turned in her very first math paper to the first-grade teacher, Mr. Clark. She anxiously awaited its return, but her happy anticipation turned to tears the next day when Mr. Clark handed back her paper with the three lacerating red marks and said to her, "Crea, I am sure you can do better if you try. After all, I had your sister, Tammy, in first grade two years ago, and she was really good in arithmetic." Crea missed recess that day. She put her head down on her desk *and she rested.*

In sixth grade, Crea went off to summer camp. She enjoyed the lovely, verdant woods that was the camp setting. During the final week of camp each cabin had to create a play to perform for all the other campers. When the time came for sharing of ideas for creating a play, Crea was excited and enthusiastic for she loved drama. She volunteered an idea. Each person could represent a different tree in the forest. The cabinmates could help one another design and make tree-like costumes. Their cabin counselor, Miss Frasier, could play the part of the forester. As she walked through their "forest" she could stop and ask each "tree" to talk about her bark, her leaves, and how she related to other creatures in the forest. Crea never found out whether or not the other girls liked her idea, because before she had even finished describing her idea, Miss Frasier interrupted to say, "Oh, that would take too much time, and besides, we did something like that last year. *(Continued on next page)*

ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

A roomful of faces stare at me. Sometimes they're teachers, sometimes parents. But they ask the same questions:

- What do we do with gifted and talented children?
- How do we educate the gifted children in our classrooms?
- How do we challenge the gifted children in our homes?

And I struggle to give them the right answer, to tell them THE way to educate gifted students, THE way to facilitate their growth.

The dream recurs, and sometimes it becomes a nightmare. The faces keep asking. I must answer them.

My search for an encyclopedia of gifted/talented education, a "World Book" of educational wisdom, brings me to a new book by James H. Borland with a central message that "those who profess to have the answer, the one best answer, for all these communities, schools, and children are wrong" (1989, p. xvi).

Borland states, "There is no single answer; no single method for program planning, identifying children, or curriculum development; no all-purpose nostrum; no panacea" (p. xvi).

And I relax, because now I know how to respond to the faces.

In a recent column we mentioned that the field of gifted education breeds ideas, innovations, theories that are adaptable to all areas of education. We are not afraid to reexamine, to expand, to risk. The contribution we have made to education is flexibility; we have stretched beyond the one-solution mentality.

Bruce Joyce and Marsha Weil have concluded that there is "no easy route to a single model that is superior for all purposes . . ." but rather "powerful options that we can link to the multiple educational goals that constitute a complete educational diet." The message of Joyce and Weil is that "the most effective teachers (and designers)" – certainly that includes parents – "need to master a range of models and prepare for a career-long process of adding new tools and polishing and expanding their old ones" (1986, p.5).

My dream has become reality as I respond to the concerned faces of parents and educators of gifted and talented children:

We are talking about children and their complex needs. We cannot be so smug as to suggest we know the perfect remedy.

I finally realize that questions are not being asked; instead, issues are being raised. We can respond to issues. We can stir our pot of educational resources, throw in some philosophy and some research, and offer alternatives that may work.

Joyce and Weil hope for a "renewal of vigorous and humble dialogue on approaches to education." They warn us of "quackery abroad in education-land – much selling of models as panaceas with little evidence that they can achieve even limited goals" (1986, p.490).

Continue your quest, parents and educators of gifted youngsters, but don't settle for one answer. Value complexity and diversity, not only in the children whose needs you seek to fulfill, but in the methods you utilize to fulfill those needs. ■

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Dorothy Knopper is State Consultant on the Gifted, Colorado Department of Education and "Open Space" columnist for *Roeper Review*.

CREATIVITY *(Continued)* Now, who has a really neat idea?" Crea was silent through the rest of the sharing that day, and when the girls were done talking, she lay down on her bunk *and she rested*.

In the few years which were to remain in Crea's life she heard the voices, always the voices:

"Has anyone ever tried it before?"
"We can't afford that."
"It can't be done."
"Oh, come on, be realistic!"
"We don't have time for that."

The voices haunted her as they became louder and louder and all the more frequently heard. Each was like a new wound and each caused her to become more withdrawn. In her final days, she had ceased entirely to paint, or draw, or sing, or offer a new idea. More and more, she felt a need to retreat and to rest.

When the autopsy revealed that Crea had expired from an overdose of killer phrases, people were surprised. Few understood what or how things had gone awry.

Today we lay Crea to rest.
May she finally rest in peace.

Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Gifted Education at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and editor of *GIT News*.

Linda Sinclair

from parent to parent

Isolation...Exhilaration... Frustration...Wonderment... Anger...

These tangled emotions are keenly felt by the parents of exceptional children. We grapple with them, wrestle them to the ground, and keep trying to maintain our emotional equilibrium as we confront disbelieving educators, unyielding officials, and antagonistic parents, while advocating for a "square peg" child who does not fit their "round hole."

Those parents fortunate enough to find a support group of other parents of gifted children or a caring professional know the feeling of a sudden weight being lifted when they recognize that they are not in this alone. But for some, the search is still going on, and the sense of aloneness is something that must be struggled with daily. Such is the case of Kevin and Cassidy Kearney of Novato, California, parents to Michael, 5 1/2, and Maeghan, 4.

"Sometimes it is very hard, because there is not anyone we can talk to about what we are going through," said Cassidy. "We would like to find other parents we could discuss these things with, as well as find Michael some peers of his mental age and chronological age for him to interact with. We went to the University of California at San Francisco and Berkeley, hoping they could give us some help, but they just looked at his test scores, shook their heads and told us 'good luck.' We didn't want good luck, we wanted support, some ideas for how to keep him challenged and how we could help him all we can."

"Michael has always devoured information, and wanted to learn about everything he sees," said Cassidy. "He started reading newspaper ads and labels in the grocery store at 14 months. He was in the Montessori schools before we moved here, but because of his age, the local school district wouldn't let him start school, so we homeschooled him for a year. This year he is taking the regular ninth grade curriculum as well as working with tutors. He is completing a chapter of advanced algebra each week, and his teacher estimates he will begin working on tenth grade curriculum before the end of the month. He read three John Steinbeck novels last week, and could carry on a discussion on all of them."

"We had thought that at some point he would slow down a little, but it seems the better we get at presenting him with information, the faster he absorbs it," said Kevin. "Because we have so little support, we are just trying to feel our way along through this, and we are now at the threshold of having to do the same things for Maeghan." ■

This column and the next describe the experiences of the Kearneys in raising an exceptionally gifted child.

Parent to Parent is your forum for sharing ideas with other parents of gifted children. We want to hear your story—what has worked, or not worked, for your family. Please send your name, address, and phone number to Understanding Our Gifted, P.O. Box 3489, Littleton, CO 80161, and we will contact you for details.

Linda Sinclair is a freelance writer from Denver, Colorado and parent of a highly gifted child.

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NOW AVAILABLE: The second issue of ***Advanced Development*** – the first journal on adult giftedness. The theme of this issue is "Models of Integration" – the sequel to the first issue, which dealt with "Positive Disintegration." The contents include a section on the theory of Carl Jung; Eleanor Roosevelt as a moral exemplar; the gifted woman as "imposter"; and "Warts and Rainbows" – a new model for understanding the complexities of giftedness in adults. Order ***Advanced Development*** today to learn about your own giftedness so that you can be a better role model for your children. A limited supply of the first issue is still available. Send $15 along with your name and address to Snowpeak Publishing. Your copy will be shipped approximately the first week in February.

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FOCUS:

THINKING SKILLS

PATHWAYS TO THOUGHTFULNESS
Dr. John Barell

FROM LOWER ORDER TO HIGHER ORDER LEARNING
Dr. Richard Paul

There is nothing of which every individual is so afraid of as getting to know how enormously much he or she is capable of doing and becoming.

—Soren Kierkegaard—

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March - April, 1990

Volume 2, Issue 4

Pathways to Thoughtfulness

John Barell, Ph.D.

During many years of working with students I have had the opportunity to listen to many voices speak about their lives within classrooms. There is one voice that speaks more clearly than others because its message is significant for all who wish to challenge gifted students to grow intellectually and emotionally. Emily was a sophomore in high school when she wrote the following in her *Thinking Journal* about a problem she had identified:

> *I guess I could call myself smart. I mean I can usually get good grades. Sometimes I worry though, that I'm not equipped to achieve what I want, that I'm just a tape recorder repeating back what I've heard. It scares me. . . I do my work, but I don't have the motivation. I've done well on Iowa and PSAT tests but they are always multiple choice. I worry that once I'm out of school and people don't keep handing me information with questions and scantron sheets I'll be lost.*
>
> *School is kind of unrealistic that way. Kids who do well often just repeat what the teacher has said. It just* *(Continued on page 9)*

FOCUS ON:

THINKING SKILLS

SPECIAL FEATURE:
Helping Our Students "Walk to Learn"
Janna Hugo, Ph.D. 7

The Hidden Gifted Learner
Suzanne Perry 3

Parenting the Gifted
Elizabeth Meckstroth 4

Instructional Strategies
Joyce VanTassel-Baska .. 5

The Reading Room
Stephanie Tolan 6

The Highly Gifted
Kathi Kearney 15

Personality Plus
Linda Silverman 16

Creative Ventures and Encounters
Jerry Flack 17

Current Developments in Gifted Education
Dorothy Knopper 18

From Parent to Parent
Linda Sinclair 19

From Lower Order to Higher Order Learning

Richard Paul, Ph.D.

Lower order learning is repeating back what the teacher or textbook said and following the correct steps in the correct order to get the correct answer. When students engage in lower order learning, they are blocked from thinking seriously about what they learn. Though in some circumstances in everyday life lower order rote learning is sufficient, those circumstances are diminishing rapidly. At the same time the damage done by multiple forms of prejudice and narrow-mindedness continues to mount.

Higher order learning means designing instruction so that students explicitly grasp the sense, the logicalness, of what they learn. It can be cultivated in almost any academic setting. Instruction aimed at higher order learning can make all additional learning easier for students. Higher order learning multiplies comprehension and insight; lower order rote memorization multiplies misunderstanding and prejudice. Higher order learning stimulates and empowers; lower order discourages and limits the learner. Though very little instruction deliberately aims at lower order *(Continued on page 12)*

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FROM THE EDITOR

THOUGHTS ABOUT THINKING SKILLS

This issue is devoted to thinking skills, and although our lead articles are specifically geared for teachers, three of the columns deal with thinking skills at home: *Hidden Gifted Learners, Parenting* and *Personality Plus*. In Suzie Perry's column, parents can learn about how to stimulate thinking skills in young children; in Betty Meckstroth's column, parents are invited to enter their children's inner worlds; and in my column, I deal with thinking skills that are overly developed: **"The Walking Argument."**

Our three lead articles all provide a rationale for incorporating thinking skills in the regular classroom, and suggest concrete teaching strategies for doing so. In John Barell's article, you will also learn how to enhance affective development through thoughtful teaching practices.

The emphasis on thinking skills in the schools is a wonderful departure from traditional education – one of those lovely gifts from gifted education to general education. The foundation of most gifted education classes is the promotion of "higher level thinking skills." Curriculum such as Matthew Lipman's "Philosophy for Children," and Anita Harnadek's "Mind Benders," were enthusiastically adopted in gifted programs before they came to the attention of regular classroom teachers.

You will notice, however, that the term "gifted" is rarely mentioned by our lead authors in this issue, nor in programs developed to enhance thinking skills. The thinking skills curriculum is designed for all children; it has become part of the general school reform movement. But the strategies were often piloted in gifted education, and are definitely good for gifted students. So do not be put off by the generic language; it is encouraging to watch the spread of these excellent teaching strategies into the regular classroom, where most gifted students spend most of their time.

I'm also happy to announce that the second issue of *Advanced Development* is hot off the press, and packed with exciting information about giftedness in adults. The theme of this issue is **"Models of Integration."** It contains article on Jung, Satir, Eleanor Roosevelt, The Gifted Woman as Impostor, and "Warts and Rainbows," a new theory on psychological traits of gifted adults. **Don't miss it! Order your copy today.**

Linda Silverman

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Suzanne M. Perry

THE HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

The Young Gifted Child (Part III)

In the last column, I shared some home activities for developing thinking skills in young gifted children. Here are a few more ideas.

Creativity Salad

Thinking Skill Used: Production

Approximate Time: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Various salad ingredients as brainstormed by you and your child, salad bowl, peeler, kitchen knife, spoon, recipe planner.

What You Do:

- Tell your child that you are going to make a ***Creativity Salad*** and that you need his or her good ideas.
- Think of all the possible ingredients you might put in your salad.
- Select the best ingredients.
- Write the recipe.
- Follow the recipe.
- Eat – Yum!

What Would Happen If.....?

Thinking Skill Used: Imagination

Approximate Time: *15-30 minutes*

Materials: Art materials of your child's choice or that you have on hand. You might consider paper, chalk, crayons, paint, markers, clay, play-doh.

What You Do:

- Have art materials of choice laid out on the table.
- Ask your child one of the "What Would Happen If...?" questions listed below, or propose some of your own.
- Invite your child to design a creative answer to the question. The response may be a picture, clay or play-doh sculpture, a painting, a poem or story, a collage or another art form.
- Remember to display the finished masterpiece in your Art Gallery *(refrigerator door).*

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF...?

We were a mouse family, instead of a human family?

We lived in another country?

It rained chocolate chips?

We never needed to sleep?

We could read other people's thoughts?

We lived in a dictatorship instead of a democracy?

The television had never been invented?

We could all fly?

Aliens from outer space landed in our town?

Room Remodeling

Thinking Skill Used: Inventions

Approximate Time: 10-20 minutes

Materials: Graph or plain paper, pencil or pen *(markers or crayons, if desired)*

What You Do:

- Tell your child that she or he will have the chance to design a dream bedroom.
- Invite your child to draw and cut out furnishings and move the pieces around until they are arranged just the way he or she wants them.
- Encourage your child to come up with unusual ideas by asking questions like:

  What could you add to make your room more fun?

  More comfortable?

  If you could have anything in the world in your room, what would you have?

  What could you put in your room that would tie in with a favorite hobby or activity?

  If we lived in the future, what would your room be like?

VARIATION FOR MORE ADVANCED CHILDREN:

You may wish to teach your child about scale drawings and use the graph paper more deliberately.

How about making up some Thinking Skill activities of your own? It's fun!

Send in your ideas and we'll print them when we have room!

Suzanne Perry, Ph.D., is Instructional Resource for Project Think in the Aurora Public Schools in Colorado, and author of the children's book, *Giftedness: Living with it and Liking it.*

PARENTING

Survival Thinking Skills

Survival, your ultimate need, is dependent on a basic thinking mode – attitude. And your attitude determines the degree to which you enjoy success, health, and happiness. Consider any attribute you have: weight, age, ability to sight read music, or childhood in Hackensack. Whether you use these traits for enjoyment and benefit of yourself and others or for remorse, depends on your attitude.

The value of any attribute or situation is determined by multiplying it by a person's positive or negative mental attitude factor. Thus, as parents of astute, intense children, the force and effects of your attitudes are crucial.

Every time your child presents to you an idea, behavior, or feeling, you have the opportunity to give *life* or *death* in your response. You can hone your nourishing presence by first doing a life-giving response assessment. Simply monitor your positive to negative reply ratio. From your children's viewpoint, how often do you give energy to their ideas and feelings? How often do you diminish their value? Write out the tally. *(Are you a safe place?)*

A prevalent theme in this column is that parents need to accept their children's feelings. Honoring feelings and being conscious of attitude options are compatible! An essential component of decision making is to incorporate the information that feelings are telling you.

Tame Your Brain

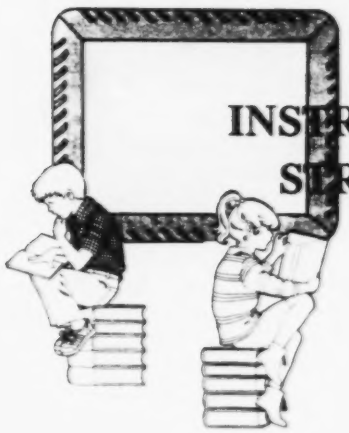
Since giftedness is greater mental power, the effects of our children's thinking processes are phenomenal! What are the consequences of their *not* being aware of their thinking, of who and what is driving them? Helping children become aware of the power of their thought processes helps them develop their self esteem. They become conscious that they always have the most important power – the power to make choices – even if it is only to choose their attitude.

Here is a gimmick to coach children to tune their thinking, to help them help themselves. First, talk with your children about how they always have voices and pictures in their minds. Ask them to think about a situation such as the last vacation they took. Ask, "What do you see? What is being said?" Then invite them to think of something else, like getting a present, and ask for more descriptions. Point out that just as they changed their thoughts, they changed the pictures and words in their heads. Have them imagine seeing the two situations occur on a TV screen. Help them to understand that they have the power to switch channels on "the TV set in their heads"!

As long as you're thinking, you may as well make your thoughts work for you, rather than **against** you! The next time you are tempted to say, "I **have** to do something," instead, assert, "I **choose** to..." or, "I've **decided** to... ." By deliberately acknowledging how your thoughts influence your behavior and your life, your children can realize how their thoughts are among their most valuable instruments.

Attitudes are contagious. Are yours worth catching?

Elizabeth Meckstroth is a therapist and consultant in Evanston, Illinois and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child*.



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Joyce VanTassel-Baska

Critical Thinking About Current Events (Part I)

It is probably fair to say that the curriculum for teaching current events has been thrown into turmoil due to the events of the past year. Easy assumptions about the European alliances and the role of satellite countries within the Soviet bloc are shifting daily and make for front page reportage. Democratic elections being planned in the eastern bloc and the ethnic turmoil in U.S.S.R. also call textbook assumptions about political stability and a cold war power balance into question. Students riots in China and the repressive measures of the government were world spectacles that caused many westerners to disbelieve that facade of an open society we could trust as we planned trade and cultural interchange. The dismantling of apartheid policy in a country that represents one of the world's great suppliers of critical raw materials is also not to be overlooked.

This is not to say the political significance of the past 40 years should be discarded, but rather that we look ahead to the shifting balances of economic and political power. The acceleration of change dictates a reexamination of America's role in global politics and its ability to deal with the implications of that change. Our perception of a luxury of time to make decisions has eroded as has our position of undisputed economic leadership.

The traditional textbook is probably the least effective curriculum device in preparing students for this new world when in transition. How to use print and video and evaluate the propaganda bias that accompanies the message becomes an even more critical part of the learning process in such times. Use of a variety of sources and crosschecking of sources needs to become a part of gifted students' daily routine on the path to becoming informed citizens.

Loss of teaching materials because of outdated texts becomes the opportunity for teaching students the techniques of exploring their media environment. Familiarity with modern print sources can easily lead students to archival material on similar topics. An example of this comes from the *Scientific American* column labeled 50 and 100 years ago in which articles or topics are summarized from issues of the magazine in those years. Scientific advances make many of those reports look naive but conclusions may be drawn by the reader. The finding of order in the chaos and bias of news reports is another practical strategy for teaching critical thinking.

Curriculum for this purpose needs to rely heavily on multiple sources, particularly periodicals, newspapers, and thoughtful television commentary to provide additional insights. The discussion of a particular event should be limited in scope to give the most depth to the investigation and allow the students to follow the course of events in the media. Subscriptions to prestigious newsgathering resources such as the *New York Times, Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, Wall Street Journal and St. Louis Post Dispatch* might supplant the use of textbooks. Current events commentary of Ted Koppel, MacNeill-Lehrer Report, and Bill Moyers are TV resources that can be used as key resources to aid in the discussion of a particular topic.

And what of the discussion approach itself? Again a model such as the Great Books provides for maximal opportunities for the airing of multiple new points and perspectives on a topic.

In my next column, I will present an example of a news release on poverty and show how it can be analyzed in group discussion using the Great Books approach in conjunction with multiple sources for data gathering.

Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Ed.D., is Jody and Layton Smith Professor of Education at William and Mary College, in Williamsburg, Virginia. She edited the book, *Comprehensive Curriculum for Gifted Learners.*

Stephanie S. Tolan

THE READING ROOM

Welcome. This visit, we're going to discuss two works by a single author, Katherine Paterson. Though the two books focus on different central issues, both deal with differences, and the use of artistic or imaginational gifts.

The first, *Bridge to Terabithia*, won the Newbery medal in 1977. It is the story of fifth grader, Jesse Aarons, a boy from a poor, rural Virginia family, who is somehow out of place within both his family and the larger community. He concentrates his energies in two directions – running (he wants to be the fastest runner in the fifth grade) and drawing (which his father calls "scribbling.") Both are considered time wasters by his parents, in whose lives only practical work has real value.

Into Jesse's world comes Leslie Burke, daughter of two writers who have left the Washington, D.C. area and bought a farm house to renovate. Leslie is even more out of place in Lark Creek than Jesse, and from her first day, when she beats him in the recess relay race, she upsets the pattern Jesse has created to define and defend himself.

As a grudging friendship develops Leslie, with her love of literature and fantasy, and Jesse, who learns from her, create the magical kingdom of "Terabithia," a wooded spot across a dry creekbed. There they build a castle and install themselves as rulers. In spite of their different backgrounds, the two children share their rich imaginations, each finding in the other a kindred spirit. As Jesse realizes, Leslie is more than a friend, she is "his other, more exciting self – his way to – Terabithia and all the worlds beyond."

Together, these two gifted children create a safe place for themselves, a place from which each is able to reach out to the world in new ways. But Terabithia, like all earthly paradises, is fragile. Eventually Jesse must learn to nourish it and his deepest self on his own. This is a beautiful book, one which many sensitive children will find emotionally difficult. It is, for that reason, a particularly good one for a family to read together.

The second Paterson book is *Come Sing, Jimmy Jo*. This one far more directly addresses the issue of living up to one's gifts. The central character is eleven year old James Johnson, child of a country singing family, gifted with an astonishing voice but without the nerve to use it in public.

When the family's chance to sing on television depends on James, he must make a decision to dare it. His grandmother says, "Sometimes the gift seems more like a burden, but if you got it, you got it. It ain't fittin' to run from it... The Lord don't give private presents... . If he give you somethin', it's only because he thinks you got the sense to share it or give it away."

Once James agrees to sing in public, his life changes swiftly and irrevocably. His name is changed to Jimmy Jo, he must leave his beloved grandmother and the mountains to live in the city, and his mother tells the world he is only nine. But the change that allows him to handle the others comes when he sings – for his gift, when allowed, becomes a driving force, a nourishment and a joy. Through the lessons he must learn as he grows with his gift, it is that joy that sustains him and makes up for the pain.

Perhaps the strongest aspect of any book by Katherine Paterson is the sheer, real-life complexity of the people and the situations she creates. Though there are messages to find, ideas to consider, neither of these books is limited to a theme; neither can be contained in a moral. Both are celebrations of life and of frail and powerful humanity.

Stephanie Tolan, from Waterford, New York, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child*.

HELPING OUR STUDENTS "Wish to Learn"

Janna Hugo, Ph.D.

Tell a child WHAT to think, and you make him a slave to your knowledge. Teach a child HOW to think, and you make all knowledge his slave.
– Henry A. Taitt –

It is 2:35 P.M. The last student has departed. The teacher walks from an expected position in the classroom doorway to the desk at the back of the room. Classes have ended for another busy day teaching language arts to middle school students. The teacher sits and picks up a 5" x 7" index card showing much use by its bent corner and smudged edges:

- **How many times today did my students have a chance to ask questions in a non-threatening environment?**
- **How many times did students have a chance to interact with each other without my intervention *(or lecturing)*?**
- **How many opportunities did I give my students to use thinking skills as learning tools for understanding subject content? In other words, what chances did I give my students to make an investment in their own learning?**
- **Finally, how does the number of opportunities above compare with the number of times I asked my students to "learn" knowledge created by others?**

This teacher is following an example modeled by a thinking skills program which provides guidelines for student involvement in their own learning. The program's teaching strategies encourage students to take ownership for their education because they "wish to learn." This is accomplished by educating teachers *to empower students with the opportunity to take responsibility for their education.*

DIALOGUE WITH THINKING SKILLS

The program, *Dialogue with Thinking Skills* (Hugo, 1989), was developed from my experiences as a classroom teacher and my graduate studies. I have based it on Costa's *Model of Intellectual Functioning* (Costa, 1985), and it includes part of Lipman's *Philosophy for Children* program (Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, 1980) combined with Eisner's theory of literacy (Eisner, 1982). Its major pedagogical features stress cognitive, affective, and aesthetic elements by:

- Using modeling as a teacher-educating technique.
- Operationalizing concepts through regular subject curriculum (teachers use their own textbooks and lesson plans).
- Designing a strategy for questioning to activate thinking skills.
- Making use of multi-sensory curriculum materials to increase learning styles.
- Using dialogue to build a classroom community with emphasis on developing respect for the opinions of all.

After studying the goals of other thinking skill programs, the ones I selected were taken from those suggested by Lipman as basic ones from which to develop a foundation for others to follow. The adaptability of the skills to any subject can be seen from the following example written by a middle school student whose language arts teacher asked her class to write "cause-effect poems" (formulating causal explanations):

Smiles

Smiles come from (EFFECT)
A warm, loving puppy (CAUSES)
A spring rain pattering on your window
Catching snowflakes on your tongue
Walking crowded malls with friends
And holding hands with someone special

Many educators agree that direct instruction in thinking skills is a classroom imperative today (Nickerson, Perkins, and Smith, 1985). To accomplish this learning priority, teachers using the *Dialogue with Thinking Skills* program employ three teaching strategies:

1. carefully designed syntax for questions and other statements,
2. a multi-sensory curriculum approach, and
3. classroom dialogue.

All three of these strategies contribute to a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to student input. Such student risk-taking requires a sense of trust and acceptance by both teacher and peers. When a teacher's questioning techniques are employed to create a sense of wonder, not recriminations, students respond by modeling this comfortable behavior with their classmates. Teacher statements structured in the manner Costa suggests present an additional technique for responding whether it be teacher to student, student to teacher, or student to student.

In a like manner, the teacher's inclusion of multi-sensory teaching methods addresses students' diverse learning styles. When this happens, fewer students feel left out and are able to respond positively to the learning objectives. Such responses encourage (Continued on page 6)

HELPING OUR STUDENTS Continued from page 7

more students to participate and gain beneficial feedback, a special kind teachers learn in this program.

Finally, when the teacher is able to build a classroom community based on a shared dialogue dominated by students, but facilitated by the teacher, the transfer of responsibility becomes very real: students talk to one another and depend on each other to provide worthwhile responses for learning. No longer is the classroom dialogue one of teacher-student, teacher-student. Instead it becomes teacher initiated, but student-to-student oriented and sustained.

SPECIAL BENEFITS

A bonus from this type of learning is students' increased ability to truly listen. To make a meaningful response, one needs to listen to what the other person says. Students soon learn if what they say is to be meaningful, they must listen to what others in the class contribute to the dialogue.

This teaching methodology encourages students' to feel good about themselves. Increased positive self concept is readily seen in a classroom using the *Dialogue with Thinking Skills* teaching strategies. As one of the students commented, "*You felt important when you gave your opinion and others listened and maybe agreed.*" Another said, "*I liked feeling comfortable asking a question.*"

Because of the program's non-directive teaching focus, teachers find a new challenge to expand their realms of thinking to include new understandings and creative endeavors. The program's goal is to infuse teachers and students with a re-opening of their minds to inquiry-type learning. Many teachers find this approach to be more rewarding than a traditional, didactic classroom environment.

IMMEDIATE AND LONG RANGE GOALS

Learning to establish the necessary learning environment is just one part of teacher education with the *Dialogue with Thinking Skills* program. Educating the teachers to understand and teach the basic thinking skills in the program is of prime importance. Once the teachers can give meaning to these skills by relating them to their various subject areas, they are able to teach their students to use these skills as tools for learning. From various activities, students are able to see these tools applying to other subjects both in and out of school. Showing students how thinking skills apply to life skills and the world of work is a vital part of the program.

In 1887, a noted English lecturer named Sir John Lubbock wrote a book stating his belief that learning should be a life-long endeavor, and he called upon the schools of his day to strive for this goal.

> [The important thing,] *is not so much that every child should be taught as that every child should be given the wish to learn. . . .If we succeed in giving the love of learning, the learning itself is sure to follow. (p. 184)*

It has been with this purpose in mind that the *Dialogue with Thinking Skills* program came into being.

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seems like time moves so quickly. There are so many things that already I'm too old to do. I'm fifteen and I feel old. There are so many things that I should be doing, but instead I watch T.V. and read books. As a matter of fact I believe I will depart now and watch Star Trek. I guess that's my major problem, insecurity. I have no self confidence really or at least at the right times. Fortunately, I'm very easy to please. An hour of bad TV pro-gramming will perk me up won-derfully. Beam me up, Scotty.

Emily's reflections have touched me deeply over the years for many reasons. I'm sure you can draw many meanings from her perceptive statement and I wonder what some of those are.

Perhaps you have focused upon the tape recorder metaphor and what it says about the too real hidden curriculum so many of our students labor under. Maybe your attention focused upon her very real concern about the nature of life beyond classroom walls. She realizes, as does Schon (1987), that such life experiences are messy and indeterminate; they do not come in neat packages with answer keys in the back of the book. Emily realizes that so many of her educational experiences are skewed inappropriately toward getting the answer anticipated by the adults who often overly control the classroom.

But what strikes me this time in re-reading Emily's poignant statement is the juxtaposition of her thinking and her feeling. She speaks of her self-confidence being low, perhaps because of the tape-recorder expectations made of her, and being worried about the dichotomy between the classroom and life beyond. I am interested in Emily's thinking and feeling because it seems to me that we have overlooked the close relationship between the two. To enhance the thinking of students, so often we neglect the affective, dispositional component of their lives.

THE NATURE OF THOUGHTFULNESS

What Emily has helped us to identify is the nature of *thoughtfulness*. I wish to stress this combination of the complex thinking Emily has engaged in *and* the feelings associated therewith. Schrag (1988) suggests that thoughtfulness is related to a person's character: "The thoughtful person's character is animated by an awareness that thinking is worthwhile" (p. 10). He goes on to speak of students' confidence that they can figure things out.

> ***...such a curriculum enhances mental and emotional development over time, and this should be one of our steadfast goals.***

Another way of looking at thoughtfulness is to consider the dictionary definition of the word. Here we see the cognitive element described as being "deliberate" and the affective element as a concern for others. The thoughtful person extends herself toward others with empathic attention.

All of these definitions expand upon commonly stressed elements within the classroom – intellectual operations that enable us to figure things out. What has been missing for too long is the realization, as in Emily's case, that very often our best thinking originates from some feelings of discomfort, some discrepancy that starts the inquiry process. We have neglected these feelings that stimulate, surround and often spur our thinking on.

The thinking or cognitive portion of thoughtfulness I liken to exploring new pathways of understanding once we have encountered some sort of difficulty or doubt. Ryle (1979) describes thinking in these terms:

> *Thinking is trying to better one's instructions; it is trying out promising tracks which will exist, if they ever do exist, only after one has stumbled exploringly over ground where they are not. (p. 78)*

Thus, thinking involves exploring new territories, taking risks that our course of action may not prove fruitful. It further involves taking "tentative steps. . . in order to learn something of their fate" and "saying things tentatively to oneself with the specific heuristic intention of trying.... to open one's own eyes . . . to get oneself out of a rut" (Ryle, 1979, p. 92).

Obviously, there are emotional aspects of such explorations – dealing with doubts, uncertainties, fears and risks. Thinking, therefore, should not be considered separately from the feelings we have which accompany us on our explorations.

I would like to share with you just a few of the pathways to enhanced thoughtfulness within our classrooms:

- Creating an environment invitational to thoughtfulness
- Designing a problematic curriculum
- Enhancing students' metacognitive awareness and control.

THE ENVIRONMENT INVITATIONAL TO THOUGHTFULNESS

My colleague, Judith MacDonald, speaks of an environment that is *invitational*, where the teacher invites students to participate more thoughtfully. There are several aspects of such an environment that we must consider, among which are providing opportunities for students to recognize the significance of the attitudes and dispositions that support or enhance the *(Continued on page 10)*

kinds of explorations Ryle describes. These attitudes include:

  - Confidence that you can solve most problems.
  - Ability to persist in the face of complications.
- Openness to alternatives.
- Willingness to take risks.
- Ability to listen to others and strive for empathy.
- Willingness to cooperate and learn from others.
- Overcoming one's impulsivity.

Each of these can and should be fostered, perhaps at different times.

One teacher, Cindy Samperi of Rye, New York, posted some of these characteristics on the wall of her fourth grade classroom and began emphasizing them to students and pointing out instances of their occurrences so that students began to find examples. One girl noted that Mozart persisted when he couldn't get his first piano sonata published. Another realized she had displayed confidence in her own abilities by working for three years to meet a challenge laid down by the gym teacher: to kick a basketball lying on the floor through one of the hoops without touching the rim. She succeeded and earned ice cream for everybody.

As you will note, the dispositions that focus upon others are:

- being open to other alternatives
- listening and
- becoming more empathic.

There are, obviously, no quick and easy ways to enhance these attitudes and skills, but here are some suggestions:

Teacher modeling. We should share with students how we experience these attitudes and processes. Take listening, for example. We can share our self-talk as we listen:

Do I understand what she is saying?

Can I relate it to anything I already know?

What images do I form?

What questions am I raising?

What do I need to check for understanding?

Design learning experiences that focus upon the disposition. For example, in order to become more empathic, to feel ourselves into the real situation of another human being, we must identify what is involved.

For example:

- Identify the subject;
- Review all we know about the person and the situation he or she is in;
- Engage in visualizing the person within the situation and attempt to recognize the feelings that person must be experiencing at the moment.

Then we can help students engage in this exercise by identifying these processes and practicing them gradually, perhaps as we study the Revolutionary War or *The Great Gatsby*. One result of such empathic experiences is that students can then draw more realistic conclusions about the courses of action and decisions made within the human dilemma.

Focus upon peer interaction. During all conversations within the classroom we should, through modeling and direct instruction, help students listen to and respond directly to the thoughts and feelings of others. We do this by emphasizing the power of such student to student statements as,

"I agree/disagree with your ideas, Robin, because . . . "

"I can see that this problem really bothers you, David."

"I wonder, Beth, if you would agree with the way I am paraphrasing/adding on to your ideas."

Such peer interaction fosters the kinds of discrepancy recognition that enhance our mental and emotional growth (Johnson & Johnson, 1979).

The environment that is invitational to Emily's having confidence in herself and being concerned with the thoughts and feelings of others is not easy to implement because students' expectations are to play the role of the tape recorder. From my experience, however, we all appreciate settings where the thoughts and feelings of all participants are valued, recognized openly and nurtured.

DESIGNING THE PROBLEMATIC CURRICULUM

As we explore alternatives within the environment we can also be re-examining the curriculum to find those problematic situations, dilemmas, conflicts and discrepancies to pose for students that foster more complex thinking. There is enough evidence now from various sources that such a curriculum enhances mental and emotional development over time, and this should be one of our steadfast goals.

...we all appreciate settings where the thoughts and feelings of all participants are valued, recognized openly and nurtured.

But such a task is not always easy, perhaps because we are too used to curricula straight out of a textbook and to teaching in the fashion we ourselves were taught. One of the first tasks in redesigning the curriculum is to pose the question, "What is worth thinking about for an extended period of time?" Elsewhere (Barell, in press), I have presented several criteria for making such decisions:

1. **robustness within the subject** – that is, the ability of the stuff we are thinking about to help us understand the core concepts of the subject; *(Continued on next page)*

2. **personal meaningfulness for students** – that is, how does or can the stuff we think about relate to the person's needs, interests, developmental stages or aspirations; and
3. **societal significance** – how does this stuff help us understand our roles or change them within society?

I have worked with many teachers who have designed such curricula, from first through twelfth grade and into college. What is characteristic of their teaching is that students are confronting problems either the teacher or they and the teacher have identified. They have spent time collaboratively exploring, daily and weekly, the new territories of problem identification, information, creating meaning and sharing the results.

METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS AND CONTROL

Let me, in conclusion, share with you some of the ways in which these teachers have helped students gain more awareness of how they go about exploring these new mental and emotional territories so they achieve a state of enhanced control over their own thinking and feeling.

First and Second Grade

Mary Mulcahy of Glen Rock, New Jersey, worked with her students over several months on problems ranging from fixing deflated kickballs to how to prevent the sixth graders from writing all over their bathroom walls. At the end of several sessions she would ask, "Were we good thinkers today?" On one occasion students responded:

"Yes, I was a good thinker because whenever we do this I can add on to someone else's thinking."

"No, I was not a good thinker because I was sort of copying other peoples' ideas."

When the unit was several weeks old, she asked, **"How do we go about solving our problems? What would you say to younger students who want to be good problem solvers?"** Here are some of their rules:

- *Think!*
- *Take the parts out of the problem that you don't really need – get to the main problem.*
- *Make the problem littler and littler.*
- *Make sure you know what you're trying to figure out before you start to do anything.*
- *Look at the problem from a different angle.*
- *Always try your best!*
- *Ask someone to help you if the problem is too big.*

As you can see, these students' experiences with a problem-posing curriculum has led them to formulate rules that apply no matter what the kind of problem or the age of the problem solvers. As you will also note, these rules involve not only cognitive strategies, but the disposition to work cooperatively with others. After listening to 24 rules, Mary wrote them on two large posters and displayed them around the room for all to see.

Sixth Grade Science

Regina Kamlet of Livingston, New Jersey, engaged her sixth graders in several science experiments, but afterwards she asked them, **"What have you learned about thinking in science? About your own thinking?"** Here are two responses:

"I learned that first you have to make a plan. Next you have to ask yourself questions. After you do that the whole thing makes sense."

"I learned that not all experiments work and to use your mistakes to learn."

Regina's students have exemplified Ryle's notions of exploration, self-questioning (or "self-talk") and realizing that not all tracks prove to be fruitful. As Bronowski (1978) noted, all real progress stems from "people who are constantly getting the wrong answer" (p. 111). Obviously, to persist the young scientist must be working in an invitational environment.

High School Art and Mathematics

Marilyn Kuhlman of Orange, New Jersey, spent a semester challenging her art students to paint, draw, use the elements of good composition, but she also asked them to log their thinking on the reverse side of their art work. One student made this observation about her own aesthetic processes:

> *The writing helped me with the drawing. It showed me what I was doing and why. I thought it just comes out, and the way it comes, it comes. . . . I thought I'd never even ask myself questions until you pointed them out to me.*

Again, the power of "saying things tentatively to oneself . . . to open one's eyes. . . [or] to get oneself out of a rut" (Ryle, 1979, p. 92).

Rosemarie Liebmann, for years a teacher of mathematics in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, spent many semesters working with students, including Emily, as they wrote in their *Thinking Journals* (Barell, Liebmann & Sigel, 1988). Here students followed a simple format:

- **What was the problem?**
- **How did I solve it?**
- **Did I do it well?**
- **What might I do differently next time?**
- **What have I learned about my problem solving?**
- **Where else can I use these strategies?**

Students' writings show how they "identify the problem. . . reread it. . . assign variables. . . recall similar problems. . . realize [that] success in [the] last problem builds my confidence for *(Continued on page 12)*

learning, traditional methods often result in it. "Good" students have developed techniques for short term rote memorization and performance; "poor" students have none. But few students understand what it means to think through the content of a subject analytically; few use critical thinking as a tool for acquiring knowledge. Higher order thinking involves students:

- actively thinking their way to conclusions;
- discussing their thinking with other students or the educator;
- entertaining a variety of points of view;
- analyzing concepts, theories, or explanations from their own points of view;
- actively questioning the meaning and implications of what they learn;
- comparing what they learn to their experiences;
- tackling non-routine problems;
- examining assumptions;
- gathering evidence.

Students need to be able to grasp the logic of what they learn; relate what they learn to their own experience and critique each by means of the other; test what they learn in everyday life; ask, **"Why is this so? How does this relate to what I have already learned? How does this relate to what I am learning in other classes?"**

Developing the habit of reflecting on the logic of what one learns is a key to critical thinking.

Without this type of learning students are at best trained, not educated – not critical thinkers or persons. As a result, their adaptability, their capacity to learn on the job and in their personal and civic lives, may be severely limited.

THE PERFECTIONS AND IMPERFECTIONS OF THOUGHT

Each of the criteria listed below are general canons for thought; they represent legitimate concerns irrespective of the discipline or domain of thought.

- clarity vs. unclarity
- precision vs. imprecision
- specificity vs. vagueness
- accuracy vs. inaccuracy
- relevance vs. irrelevance
- consistency vs. inconsistency
- logicalness vs. illogicalness
- depth vs. superficiality
- completeness vs. incompleteness
- significance vs. triviality
- fairness vs. bias
- adequacy (for purpose) vs. inadequacy

To develop one's mind and discipline one's thinking with respect to these standards requires extensive practice in long-term cultivation. Of course achieving these standards is a relative matter and often they have to be adjusted to a particular domain of thought. Being *precise* while doing mathematics *(Continued on page 13)*

PATHWAYS *(Continued)*

this one..., "etc. Responding to lessons learned, one student wrote:

> *I learned that I, myself, can actually solve my own problems. I like to be independent at home, so why not with correcting problems (scholastic ones). Yeah, it may take longer, but I'm probably doing myself a favor by thinking harder and overcoming my stubbornness.*

This student, like those quoted before her, has exemplified the essence of creating the environment and instructional/curricular strategies that enhance our pathways to thoughtfulness. These students are realizing that they can succeed if they have confidence in themselves and persist as well as think strategically about how to solve problems. They exemplify the best of Huck Finn who, after floating down the Mississippi, felt he had to light out for the Territory to continue his explorations and not become too civilized, and of Isabel Archer, in James' *Portrait of a Lady*, who reflected:

> *I try to judge for myself; to judge wrong I think is more honorable than not to judge at all. I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock... (James, 1963, p. 149)*

When there's exploration of new territory to be done and new pathways to be blazed, the sheep and the tape recorders will just have to get out of the way!

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NOTE: The text of this article is adapted from the author's forthcoming book, ***Pathways to Thoughtfulness.***

Dr. John Barell is a writer, teacher and staff developer from Montclair State College, NJ, who often reflects upon the lives of Stephen Dedalus, Richard E. Byrd, and Thomas Merton.

is not the same as being precise while writing a poem or describing an experience.

FROM ASSOCIATIVE TO LOGICAL LEARNING

What we find together in our experience we *associate* in our minds. If we are frequently punished for not eating our spinach we associate spinach with punishment. If it frequently rains in the summer, we associate rain with summer time. This is the lowest and simplest kind of learning. It is effortless and automatic.

True education must go beyond association to rational scrutiny. We use logic when we try to determine objectively whether our associations have a basis in reason or fact: Does the association "make sense"? Do we have evidence or reasons to support it? Does it "fit in" with other things we know? For example, by studying climate we come to recognize that there is no necessary relationship between rain and summer. By reflecting on spinach and punishment, we can readily see there is no objective relation between them. We can come to see that anyone can make up numbers (53.738% of U.S. citizens are insane), or use intellectual-sounding language without knowing what he or she is talking about. We can figure out why the connections we had formed through mere association do or don't make sense, do or don't stand to reason, are or are not based on sound inferences.

When we analyze the logic of things, rather than simply associate them, we raise our learning to a higher order through critical thought. We lay the foundation for educated transfer of what we learn to divergent contexts and we begin the process of developing our capacity for rational assent. We begin to develop standards for belief. We begin to learn to question what we read, what we hear, and what we subconsciously infer. We force *logical* rather than simply *associative* connections. We often say to ourselves: "Let me see, does that make sense?" We then talk our way through inferences, reminding ourselves of key things we know as we proceed. Sometimes we devise an experiment or test of some kind or ask others for their thinking, which we then analyze and consider.

Developing the habit of reflecting on the logic of what one learns is a key to critical thinking. Not only does this involve the spirit of figuring things out for oneself, it also involves pursuing the roots of what one learns until one establishes logical foundations for it. This involves tying any given thing to be learned into a basic logic one already understands. For example, when studying history, the critical thinker does not simply memorize disconnected (or even connected) names, facts, and dates. Nor is it enough to reflect upon alternative historical explanations. One also reflects upon the very logic of historical thought itself. What is it to think historically? To what extent is historical thinking a dimension of all of our thinking about the world?

> ***Begin each topic by having students tell or write about what they know or think about it.***

When we grasp that all humans shape their present by their reading of their past and their anticipation of the future in the light of the past, we can come to terms with the logic of history. We then approach not only all historical texts, but all interpretation of experience, realizing that all recording or interpreting of the past is selective, presupposes value judgments about what is important, and organizes what is recorded within one of a number of rationally defensible frames of reference or points of view.

To develop their sense of the logic of history, students must read history books as historians read them, asking questions such as these:

- **What is left out?**
- **What is thrown into the background?**
- **What is placed in the foreground?**
- **How are events conceptualized?**
- **What point of view informs the text?**
- **What assumptions are made?**
- **What implications does this reading of history have for our interpretation of the present?**

These questions presuppose awareness of the elements of thought. Raising them while reading or writing history, students develop their own historical thought, judgment, and knowledge. They leave with something much richer and more valuable than the scattering of memorized dates, names, and accounts, bits and pieces of someone else's historical thought.

This is the kind of attitude and spirit we want to cultivate in our students. How can we do so? By developing teaching strategies that encourage higher order learning.

TEACHING FOR CRITICAL THINKING

I, and teachers I have worked with, have found it relatively easy to remodel standard lessons, kindergarten through high school, to infuse critical thinking principles. The following general recommendations are offered:

1) Assess the amount of content as well as the way that content is covered. There is more than one way to "cover" any given domain. As little as possible should be spoon-fed to students in lectures. As much as possible the student's capacity to reason should be used as a learning tool. In a history class, for example, the time ordinarily allocated to lecture on our revolutionary war could instead be used by having students research different interpretations of the war and argue for *(Continued on page 14)*

them. Students might then write a dialogue between two imagined historians, each arguing for different views of the war. To do this well requires not only that the students gather evidence and data but that they learn how data are selected, shaped, organized, and integrated into a historical perspective. The bottom line is that coverage should be designed so that students think their way through it.

2) Analyze the logic of what we teach. We should always teach with a clear conception of the most basic goals and purposes behind what we cover. Then we should continually stimulate our students to relate what they learn to those basics. We must explicitly analyze content to be able to design activities and assignments that continually force the students to move back and forth inferentially from basic concepts, assumptions, principles, theories, and data, to derivative concepts, standard and novel applications, reasoned conclusions, and constructed interpretations.

We could ask ourselves what those who work in our subject areas actually do – where they start? How they approach their subject? How they correct their own thought? How they gather and assess information? Then instruction could be designed that parallels those processes. Ask what the well-educated person does with knowledge in the subject then create similar tasks for students. This approach is possible in all subject areas.

3) Begin where the students are. Discover and analyze, then address students' current thought regarding that which they are to learn. Begin each topic by having students tell or write about what they know or think about it. Bringing previous knowledge and misconceptions out publicly increases students' ability to take in new ideas, to compare them to their original thoughts, and so to change their beliefs, rather than merely superimposing the new on the old. Construct activities that pit students' misconceptions against knowledge of the subject to allow students to discover for themselves *why* they should abandon their misconceptions.

4) Use cooperative learning as a teaching tool. Most people learn more easily when they have to articulate what they are learning to others. Unlimited activities and assignments can be structured, both inside and outside of class, so that students articulate, explain, use, organize, justify, and extend basic concepts, assumptions, data and evidence, problems and issues, theories and principles, and all other fundamental elements within the logic of what they are learning.

Even if some material is covered didactically, pause periodically, put the students into pairs and ask them to reconstruct important ideas covered. Or ask them to think of one application of the ideas covered. Or one student might question the other on the assumptions or implications of the lecture thus far. Similar questions can be posed to students to work on individually.

Sometimes the students can be put into groups of two's, sometimes three's, sometimes four's. It is a good idea to require short written assignments for each class meeting, something which requires analysis and synthesis of what was covered in the previous class. By exchanging papers in class, having some students read theirs aloud, then discussing criteria for assessing them, the students can give each other feedback. Each student can be required to keep all papers in a file. Five files a week can be collected and one or two papers from each file can be graded. Thus, students can actively think their way through the logic of the subject, without the teacher having to grade an exceptionally large number of papers. By writing for their peers, students begin to see why they must express themselves clearly and support their conclusions with reasons and evidence.

CONCLUSION

Some of these ideas represent new kinds of assignments and activities; some represent new modes of assessment; some represent new ways to structure instruction. One can design any class so that students must think their way through the content. Those committed to critical thinking should help those most receptive to it. Interested teachers should work with other interested teachers. Interested administrators should work with and help support interested teachers.

How long will it be before students at every level of schooling will have their thinking stimulated? When will we begin to move from lower order to higher order learning? Soon, I hope.

Richard W. Paul is Director of the Center for Critical Thinking at Sonoma State University in California.

Few people think more than two or three times a year; I have made an international reputation for myself by thinking once or twice a week.

George Bernard Shaw

Kathi Kearney

HE HIGHLY GIFTED

Finding Highly Gifted Children (Part I)

What does it mean to have no test which can identify a child such as Leta Hollingworth's 180 IQ subjects? What kinds of emotional risks do these children face if the full extent of their abilities is not understood, and the normal developmental patterns of the extraordinarily gifted child are viewed, instead, as abnormal maladjustment to society?

Hollingworth (1942) identified such issues as difficulty in finding congenial friends, discrepancies in development, very early interest in origins and destinies, problems of conformity, problems in playing with age-peers, and the difficulty of finding enough academic challenge at school as part of the normal, expected development of children in the very highest ranges of intelligence. A child displaying these difficulties in a contemporary classroom might be automatically labeled as immature, a behavior problem, or worse.

Although there are other ways of identifying extraordinary giftedness besides the use of test scores, for many families and schools this is an important component in beginning to understand the extent of a highly gifted child's exceptionality, and providing appropriate educational and social/emotional intervention. It is ironic, therefore, that two major developments in the allied fields of psychology and gifted education – the revision of a major test of intelligence, and an emphasis on expanding conceptions of giftedness – should combine to inadvertently penalize those children who have been viewed historically as most in need of special educational programs for the gifted. Yet, in practice, this is exactly what has happened.

When the *Stanford-Binet Fourth Edition* was issued in 1986, many administrators and educators of the gifted simply assumed that the newer norms were more valid than the old ones, not realizing that the new test itself "represents a considerable departure from earlier editions" (Keith, Cool, Novak, White, and Pottebaum, 1988, p. 253) and "appears to be a very different instrument from its predecessor" (Rothlisberg, 1987, p. 193). Gone is the entire concept of mental age, as well as many of the verbal and abstract reasoning items which allowed highly intellectually gifted children to more fully demonstrate the range of their abilities. Vernon (1987) noted that neither the Wechsler intelligence scales nor the Stanford-Binet Fourth Edition "give as much opportunity as the L-M for gifted children to display their fluency, imagination, unusual or advanced concepts, and complex linguistic usage" (p. 256). One study, reported in the Fourth Edition Technical Manual, showed scores of gifted children on the Fourth Edition to be "substantially lower" than Form L-M scores – 13.7 points, almost a full standard deviation (Sattler, 1988, p. 252).

It is important to note that the original 1916 Stanford-Binet, as well as the 1937 (Forms L and M) and 1960 (Form L-M) revisions have all played a major research role in our understanding of intellectually gifted children, and particularly the highly gifted. Lewis Terman's longitudinal study of gifted children, still continuing today, used the 1916 version of the test. Leta Hollingworth (1942) used both the 1916 test and the 1937 revision in her study of children above 180 IQ.

Perhaps even more important than the potential loss of a 70-year research history are the human issues involved for highly gifted children who would have received extrapolated scores of 160 to 200 IQ on the "old Binet" (Form L-M and earlier revisions), and for their families.

In my next column, I will discuss the impact of the underestimation of one's giftedness and present a method for finding students who test beyond the norms of current instruments.

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PERSONALITY PLUS

The Walking Argument

How many times have you heard, **"That's not fair!"**?? It seems appropriate in an issue devoted to "Thinking Skills" to address the thinking function taken to its extreme: *the Walking Argument*. One of the most disconcerting qualities of the gifted is their tendency to argue with everyone about everything. This is particularly true of the highly gifted, who have an inherent need for precision in thought and language.

In 1927, Leta Hollingworth described "early interest in the precise meanings of words" (p. 3) as one of the symptoms of high ability. She went on to say:

> *Exactness in all mental performances is characteristic, and keen love of precise facts. Allied to this is the perception of things in their multitudinous relationships, with frequent use of the phrase, "Well that depends." A young child who spontaneously utters the phrase, "That depends," is sure to catch the attention of one who thoroughly knows gifted children. (p. 4)*

Hollingworth (1939) recognized that the highly gifted are very argumentative by nature and she dealt with the problem by providing special training in "disputation" to children above 170 IQ, so that they would learn how to argue fairly. One of her students, Dr. Herbert Carroll, developed a training program in forensics for the gifted including:

> *argument with oneself, involving logic and psychology of thinking; argument with others in private, involving etiquette and the art of polite disagreement; argument in public, involving parliamentary law, the rules of order, the nature of evidence, and the art of the persuasion of crowds. (Hollingworth, 1939, p. 585)*

Sounds a lot like a "thinking skills" curriculum, doesn't it?

The roots of argumentativeness are imbedded in personality structure as well as in intelligence. In my last column, I mentioned two of the traits revealed by the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* (Myers, 1962), "perceiving" and "judging." Two additional traits measured by the same instrument play a role in the need to argue: "intuition" and "thinking."

Highly gifted children and adults are often *intuitive thinkers*, whereas mildly gifted tend to be *intuitive feelers*. *Intuitive thinkers* have two ways to be right – logic and intuition – so you can never win an argument with them. Individuals high in both traits learn by questioning, arguing and debating. They are born lawyers! Since they are used to being right, their need to be right can become a compulsion. They may need assistance in learning to respect the feelings of others.

If you are living with or trying to teach an Argument, here are some tips.

1. Try not to feel threatened by the child's need to argue. Some minds need to argue as a form of exercise.

2. Be clear about what is negotiable and what is not. If you have firm standards on certain issues, *(e.g., name calling is not allowed, everybody helps, etc.)*, the child will learn to respect those boundaries.

3. Appeal to the child's growing sense of fairness. Ask, "Is this 'fair' for just you or is it fair for everyone, including me?"

4. Help the child understand other's feelings. The need to be right can be tempered by helping the child understand other people's feelings and reactions to their arguments.

5. Discuss mercy versus justice. Talk about values of mercy and justice. Then look for applications of both in various situations in real life, books, and the media. When is mercy more appropriate than justice?

6. Be a role model of appreciation for other views. Children learn what they see. Do you have an acute need to be right that you are inadvertently teaching through your actions?

7. Use humor. When all else fails, "That's why I'm the mommy," may have to be said with love and good spirits.

8. Get counseling. If the child or other family members are terribly threatened unless they are right all the time, this is a sign of low self-esteem and may need professional assistance.

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IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY

Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack
Tour Guide

Newbery Award winning author Madeleine L'Engle (*A Wrinkle In Time*) argues the case for the absolute and fundamental value of words in the lives of children in her published journal:

> *The more limited our language is, the more limited we are; the more limited the literature we give to our children, the more limited their capacity to respond, and therefore, in their turn, to create. (L'Engle, 1972, p. 149)*

Words are one of humankind's most potent resources. Try to imagine a world without words. Gifted and creative children and adolescents need the raw material of vocabulary to achieve their creative potential. There are many ways to help young people both increase their vocabularies and develop an appreciation for the richness of language.

A trip to the reference section of the library may serve as a fine introduction to the many kinds and varieties of dictionaries and thesauruses. A visit to the bookstore may also be important since creative writers are never too young to begin building their own personal reference libraries. In addition to dictionaries and thesauruses which are available for readers of all ages and reading levels, many other fascinating word books await intrepid word investigators. One recent volume, *The World Almanac Guide to Good Word Usage* (Manser, 1989), is filled with good advice about how *not* to misuse, misspell, or mispronounce the English language. Ammer's (1989) fun reference book, *It's Raining Cats and Dogs... And Other Beastly Expressions* explains the origins of the many animal-related expressions we use from "Dog days" to "Eating crow."

Many activities exist to help students enlarge and enhance their vocabularies. Challenge students to bring at least one new word to class or to the family dining table each day. Of course, the word must be used in a proper context. A game can be made of this type of word acquisition activity if students are further challenged to "slip" the new word into an inquiry or a response so that its use is not initially detected by listeners.

Another way that students can accumulate new words is through the completion of sophisticated ABC books of their own making. Dare students to create alphabet books that contain the biggest and most sophisticated words they can find about subjects being studied in school, their favorite hobbies, and other themes of choice.

Students will enjoy creatively using newly acquired words to rewrite familiar proverbs. Provide a list of standard proverbs and ask them to use a thesaurus to rewrite the well known adages with "big" words. ***"Curiosity killed the cat"*** becomes ***"Inquisitiveness slaughtered the feline."***

Just as it is vital for creative students to build a large vocabulary, it is equally essential for them to appreciate the richness of their language. The following assignment achieves this regardless of whether it is accomplished at home or in school. Students choose *one* word for intensive study and scrutiny. The word should be an abstract noun (e.g., love, fear, patriotism, faith). The following lesson rubric may be shared with learners.

- **Write your own definition of the word. What meaning does the word hold for you?**
- **Artistically represent the meaning the word has for you. Consider a collage, a watercolor, a sculpture.**

ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

Upon hearing of a major cut in gifted and talented education in a large metropolitan district, a friend asked, "Why do you stay in this field? It has such low valleys." Without hesitation, I replied, "But it has such high peaks!"

As I reflect on this conversation, I visualize the "highs": legislation and subsequent funding for gifted students, professional development for teachers of the gifted, inclusion of gifted and talented education as an integral part of curriculum, conferences on gifted education attended by teachers and parents from all over the world, and most importantly, utilizing such successes to make an impact on the lives of children in need.

Then I think of other happenings in a career in gifted education: a weekend presentation to rural teachers starved for information, a lengthy evening phone call to a desperate parent, an after-hours conference concerning a child's lost self esteem.

Do those of us who struggle in this fledgling and often misunderstood educational field suffer from that 20th century malady called workaholism? Perhaps. Or are we unafraid to "fall in love with something and pursue it with intensity and in depth"? (Torrance, in Presbury & Henderson, 1984, pp. 4-5)

Another friend reluctantly returned to work three months after major surgery. I imagined myself in such a situation, impatient to immerse myself in the challenge of my work, worried that I would never catch up. My friend's response to my inquiry regarding his first day back was, "It was as meaningless as it was before surgery."

How sad I feel for my friend. He has not "fallen in love" with his work. E. Paul Torrance advises us to "know, understand, take pride in, practice, develop, use, exploit, and enjoy your greatest strengths" (In Presbury & Henderson, 1984, p. 5). Maybe the passion for what we do is not workaholism after all, but the utilization of our strengths to effectively serve students.

I believe that educators and parents of the gifted are committed to understanding the make-up of high potential youth and facilitating the development of that potential. When I know that it is possible to guide a child in becoming all that he or she can be, then my work has indeed become my passion.

The valley may be the cut in educational services, but the peak is a child's life.

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Dorothy Knopper is State Consultant on the Gifted, Colorado Department of Education and "Open Space" columnist for *Roeper Review*.

CREATIVITY *(Continued)*

- **Write an essay about a personal experience in which the word played a role.**
- **Compose a creative story or a poem that illustrates the meaning of the word.**
- **Poll and record the responses of at least five other people. What meaning does the word signify for each?**
- **Coin a new word or expression that can serve as a synonym for your word? Give the new word a definition.**
- **Locate the word in an unabridged dictionary and note the derivation of the word and the multiple definitions provided.**
- **Arrange all your words together in a folder or portfolio and share with your friends, classmates, and family. Save your word and give to your first child on his or her tenth birthday.**

We end this journey with a bit of sage advice about the use of words offered by Adlai Stevenson:

Man does not live by words alone, despite the fact that he sometimes has to eat them.

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Linda Sinclair

from parent to parent

In the last issue, we spoke with the Kearneys, who shared their concerns about their highly gifted child. This column is a continuation of that discussion.

"Right now, we could use some help as we struggle with some moral issues, such as should we have given Michael all the information he craved, or did we rob him of his childhood?" said Kevin. "All we hear are 'wive's tales'; we were told at one point that if we let Michael skip kindergarten, we would emotionally scar him, and that children who do not go through kindergarten will be psychotic in ten years. No one is there who will tell us the good things. We have to take it upon ourselves to advocate for him, to gather the information on highly gifted children that is out there, but buried."

"Michael keeps us very busy. He has so much energy and is always learning and absorbing information," said Cassidy. "He can come up with answers so unlike what we would expect. He acts like a normal child at times, and at other times, he just ravages whatever he is interested in. He gets up at 6 a.m. to work on his lab work (the school's liability insurance will not allow him to do his physical science lab work at the school), and after he goes to bed at 10 p.m., I usually spend close to two hours restudying everything I did in high school so I can help him if he has questions."

"Because my husband is in the Navy, we have to move every 18 months or so, and this causes some real frustration, because we are constantly having to re-prove Michael's strengths to the schools, and re-fight all of the same battles. Since Michael is a visual-spatial learner, his answers to the questions posed to him in the classroom can be quite creative. Sometimes the teacher will tell him that he is wrong, but his answers are not wrong, they are just creative. We have also had to battle parents or teachers who feel Michael must be 'knocked down a peg.' He doesn't need these people taking it upon themselves to knock at his self-esteem. We haven't even begun to think about what will happen in the future; at the rate Michael's learning is accelerating, he could be done with high school by the time he is seven, and what happens then? We have learned to just take things day by day for now."

"We get upset because we feel there are a lot of gifted children out there who are not getting the services they need. The laws provide so much for disabled children, and I believe they need the help too, but what about our exceptional children? They may not be disabled, but we as parents have to put as much time, energy and money into raising them, and the support just isn't there."

Linda Sinclair is a freelance writer from Denver, Colorado and parent of a highly gifted child.

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The Many Faces of Giftedness *(Staff Development on Gifted & Talented Education)*

April 17, 1990. It's a live interactive teleconference via satellite with telephone call-in from 3:30-5:00 MST. For registration information call: Dorothy Knopper, Consultant Gifted/Talented Education, Colorado Department of Education, (303) 866-6849.

Ring in the Future *(1990 State Conference)*

April 17 - 28, 1990. Presented by the Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education. Dr. Felice Kaufmann is the featured speaker. For information, contact the following co-chairpersons: Dr. Sandra Mangano, (215) 368-0400, ext. 242 or Dr. Ceil Frey, (215) 645-1900.

Fourth National Conference on the Highly Gifted

May 4 - 5, 1990. Held at the Southern Maine Vocational Technical Institute, South Portland, Maine, this conference is sponsored by The Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children. Write to P.O. Box 464, South Casco, Maine 04077 for further information.

Dabrowski's Theory of Emotional Development and its Implications for Giftedness

June 6-10, 1990. A five-day intensive workshop will be held at Ashland University, Ashland, Ohio. Instructors include: Michael Piechowski, Northland College; Linda Silverman, Gifted Child Development Center; R. Frank Falk, and Nancy Miller, University of Akron. For more information contact: Dr. Jane Piirto, Ashland University, Ashland, OH 44805, (419) 289-5379.

High Ability Over the Life Span

June 21-23, 1990. The conference on giftedness through the life span is organized by the University of Utrecht, and will be held in Utrecht, The Netherlands (official language: English). Contact: Secretariat ECHA-conference, Dr. W.A.M.Kok, Secretary-General, ISOR afd. Onderwijsonderzoek, Heidelberglaan 1, 3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands. Telephone: 030-534867 or 030-534555.

NEXT ISSUE

FOCUS:
INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES: AUSTRALIA

THE EXCEPTIONALLY GIFTED CHILD
Dr. Miraca Gross
University of Melbourne

Dr. John Feldhusen
Purdue University

FINDING AND SERVING GIFTED PRESCHOOLERS
Dr. Mary L. Parkinson
Hobart, Tasmania

There is nothing of which every individual is so afraid of as getting to know how enormously much he or she is capable of doing and becoming.

—Soren Kierkegaard—

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May – June, 1990

Volume 2, Issue 5

The Exceptionally Gifted Child

Miraca U.M. Gross, Ph.D.

John F. Feldhusen, Ph.D.

This article is based on a recent study of 32 Australian children with IQs greater than 160. Issues for the exceptionally gifted child, as well as solutions, appear to be similar in different countries.

Hadley Bond, aged 22 months, was out for a walk with his mother. It was a warm day, and Hadley was getting tired. His mother checked her watch and found that they had been out for longer than she had intended. "My goodness, Hadley," she said, pleasantly, "can you guess how long we've been walking?" "About 26 1/2 minutes, I think," said Hadley – and he was right!

Even prior to this, Holly and Robert Bond had realized that Hadley was a child of truly phenomenal mathematical ability. At 18 months of age he was already fascinated by the math drill programs used by his two older brothers on the family's home computer. He delighted in simple addition problems. He would work out the answer to a question with the help of plastic beads, and type it into the computer, laughing with delight when the response

(Continued on page 7)

FOCUS ON:

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES:

AUSTRALIA

INSIDE

Kaleidoscope
James Delisle 3

Parenting the Gifted
Elizabeth Mackintosh 4

Instructional Strategies
Joyce VanTassel-Baska .. 5

The Reading Room
Stephanie Tolan 6

The Highly Gifted
Kathi Kearney 10

Adolescent Passages
Thomas Buescher 13

Bright Beginnings
Martha Muscloch 16

Creative Ventures and Excursions
Jerry Flack 17

Current Developments in Gifted Education
Dorothy Knapper 18

From Parent to Parent
Lisa Ferguson 19

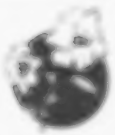
Finding and Serving Gifted Preschoolers

Dr. Mary L. Parkinson

We have little insight into the fate of those children who seem remarkable when very young but are not so identified later on. An important condition, possibly harmful to the development of giftedness, is the lack of opportunities some children have for exercising their talents. An argument for identification of the gifted and early intervention is that, unlike other attributes, giftedness is a quality which for the most part is latent and, if undiscovered, remains unfulfilled. During the course of a lifetime, giftedness can go undetected and undeveloped. It takes training, motivation, and fellow beings to make it come alive.

My research project intended to identify a group of preschool gifted children and to offer some of them an educational program in order to determine whether, by the end of the intervention period, the experimental group had progressed at a faster rate than the control group. Since investigations of this nature had not been previously conducted in Tasmania, it was considered essential to research the area.

(Continued on page 10)



FROM THE EDITOR

NEW FACES

Happy Spring! We welcome this season of new beginnings with new contributors and some different roles for our usual contributors. Dr. James R. Delisle, Coordinator of Gifted Education at Kent State University, will be offering his insights on a variety of topics in the column, "**Kaleidoscope,**" which will appear every other issue. In this issue, Jim discusses the development of self-concept and sibling relations. Glad to have you aboard, Jim!

We also welcome a new Parent-to-Parent columnist: Lisa Ferguson, from Haverill, Massachusetts. Lisa is a parent of highly gifted children, known for her great sense of humor (and practical jokes directed at me annually at the Hollingworth Conference on the Highly Gifted!) If you are willing to be interviewed for Lisa's column, please contact *Understanding Our Gifted* at (303) 708-0986. Thanks for your help.

As a creative challenge, two of our regular columnists – Suzanne Perry and Martha Morelock – will be switching columns this fall! Suzanne has 4 young children of her own and her last two columns attest to her fascination with early childhood education. She will enliven "Bright Beginnings" with activities for home enrichment and new perspectives on young gifted children. In our next issue, Suzie wraps up her Hidden Gifted Learners column by discussing gifted learning disabled students.

Martha Morelock will complete her tenure as our "Bright Beginnings" columnist in the next issue, with the second part of her discussion on child prodigies. As our new "Hidden Gifted Learners" columnist, Martha will share the latest information about the culturally diverse gifted, morally and emotionally gifted, and other special groups that are often overlooked.

Our main theme for this Spring issue is "International Perspectives: Australia." We are fortunate to bring you articles from two of Australia's leaders in gifted education: Dr. Miraca Gross of the University of Melbourne, the first professor in gifted education in Australia, and Dr. Mary Parkinson, a psychologist in Hobart, Tasmania, who initiated the first early childhood education program for the gifted in Tasmania. Dr. Gross completed her dissertation this year at Purdue University, under the direction of Dr. John F. Feldhusen, one of gifted education's most distinguished leaders. Together, they present a study of 32 extraordinarily gifted Australian children with IQs in excess of 160. The universality of the problems of this population is quite revealing.

Thank you for your continued patronage of *Understanding Our Gifted.* Please let us know what other topics you would like to see in future issues.

Linda Silverman

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KALEIDOSCOPE

"Who Am I, Anyway?" Self-Concepts and Sibling Comparisons

It has always seemed ironic to me that children begin to develop *self-concepts* only after they see themselves in relation to *others*. For only when children become aware that other people differ from them – in appearance, abilities, etc. – do they begin to get a sense of who they are, as individuals. Inevitably, comparisons then begin, and sometimes children see themselves as less able than they really are.

Many parents feel an undeserved sense of guilt when this occurs. "What did I do wrong?" they ask. Or, "I never compare my children with one another," they state. And quite often, the parents are right – they did nothing to promote the negative self-images that their son or daughter has developed. Instead, the comparisons are often more subtle, and they take root quietly within the child's own mind, as he or she begins to "rate" himself in comparison to other children – often, siblings.

For example: Anna is the younger of two daughters, ages 6 and 9, and recently has enjoyed her "career" in preschool and kindergarten. She was already reading by age four, and has always seemed to enjoy the company of her big sister, Leslie. Now, though, Anna has started coming home from school and reporting that she is stupid. She hates school, she says, and she doesn't like reading anymore, either. Of course, Anna's parents are concerned for her – she is a bright child, and they don't want to see her develop a negative attitude toward school or learning.

What should or shouldn't Anna's parents do? The first thing to avoid is a verbal assault on Anna's beliefs. Statements such as, "But you *are* a smart girl, just look how well you do in school," or "Don't be silly – you *love* reading," do not register with Anna because she is not yet ready to accept them. In a sense, she *can't* hear them, because those statements go against everything Anna is saying about herself to her parents. If Anna were to say "OK, I guess you're right," that could mean (to her) that she *is* stupid, as she doesn't even know what she readily likes and is good at.

Instead, it would be better if Anna's parents took their daughter's statements as seriously as does Anna. Statements and follow-ups like "It must be awful to have to sit in school all day if you hate it so much," or "When do you hate reading the most?" will enable Anna to continue the conversation, and to get more specific about her likes, dislikes, fears and joys.

More than likely, Anna knows that she is not as stupid as she says, and if you were to observe her in school, you would probably find her enjoying her time there quite a bit. What Anna is doing, then, is sending out messages that may be saying any of the following:

"I'm not my sister, so don't expect me to be," or "Just because I'm smart that doesn't mean I'm perfect," or "If I tell you now that I'm dumb, then you won't be surprised later if I get a bad grade."

In her own way, Anna (and others like her) is trying to preserve the fragile concept of herself as a student. Earlier (when she was 3 or 4), it was only her parents' reactions and approval that mattered – Anna became whole if she knew she was pleasing Mom and Dad. Now, in the wider world of school, there are more people to answer to: parents, teachers, classmates, siblings. So many people to please for a six year old! Now, to forestall disappointing others, and to hold on to the still-emerging self-concept that she has, Anna will keep expectations "in check" by keeping them low.

Most likely, this reaction is more a "holding pattern" than an impression that is set in stone. Eventually, as children match and exceed the somewhat low standards they talk about publicly, and if they begin to see that others appreciate them for who they are as individuals, *not* just as scholars, their self-concepts and expectations will rise. Of course, parents and teachers can help this process along by doing the following:

- Not overreacting to or negating what a child says.
- *Acknowledging* that each of us is better at some things than others.

(Continued on page 10)

PARENTING

Creating the Comfort Zone

"If the kids are smart, there are no problems. Why do anything more when everything's going their way?" To the generic observer, our children have more than enough to be satisfied. But in many areas of their lives, they may be starving. In accommodating to academic organizational needs, their most enlightened elements may be winnowed away while the rest regresses to the normal mode/the safe comfort zone of social approval.

When Kathi Kearney and I were sharing "Wait 'till you hear this!" yarns, we turned our tales into comic relief. We looked at funding and labels for services to children with exceptional needs. There are programs for "LD," learning disabled; "ED," emotionally disturbed; and "BD," behaviorally disordered. Nearly all of "our kids" are "CD," *curriculum deficient*!

To substantiate how "CD" most of our children are, The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) stated, "over half of the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school" (p.8). Perhaps parents of gifted children need to invoke the two guiding principles of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act which have dramatically changed the educational service delivery system: Placing the child in the least restrictive environment and creating individualized educational plans tailored to meet each child's unique needs. The "least restrictive environment" for the gifted child is often a special class. Stephanie Tolan (1989) implores, "We do not have the moral right to hold one child back to make another child feel better."

Our children offer us rich hindsight and make poignant pleas for our vital involvement and support. My "quote notes" from gifted children and adults include:

What I regret most about my education was not having the opportunity to perform brilliantly...

When it stops being good for me, I need to go on to something else.

Listen to the student. Look at their eyes.

Don't give up; don't get depressed. Please be pushy... The child may be too young or too beaten down.

I have no one to talk to.

Surely we must balance the needs of the environment with those of the child.

What can parents do?

- Read. Go to conferences and workshops about meeting needs of gifted children. Fortify yourselves with information!
- Ask your child what are the good things about school and what could be better.
- Ask your child what each of you might do to make some changes.
- Ask the teacher how you can help create just one specific change in your child's program.
- Look for the good things in place and build on them. Create a "user-friendly" network in the school with perhaps the librarian, school nurse and counselor.
- Do not waste your time and energy trying to transform your enemies.
- Talk with each other; create a telephone support system.
- Pool your resources to supplement what your school is offering. Access existing community resources.
- DO IT ANYWAY! It's easier to get forgiveness than permission.

NOTE: See my column in Volume 1, Issue 3 of Understanding Our Gifted (p. 4) for positive suggestions for working effectively with your child's school.

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INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Joyce VanTassel-Baska

Critical Thinking About Current Events - Part II

In my last column, I described the importance of using up-to-date sources of information for understanding current events. In this column, a news release is analyzed using the Great Books Model.

Sample Reading Passage and Follow-Up Discussion Questions

Can poverty in the United States be abolished within the limits of the welfare state?

The answer is clear enough. The government's own figure demonstrate that the current antipoverty programs are basically inadequate....

Today's poor are different from the pre-Second World War poor. The "old" poor lived at a time when economic opportunity was the national trend, when the net income from the growth of American manufacturing increased by 4,500 per cent. It was the "old" poor, mostly Eastern European immigrants unified by language and culture, who created the big-city political machines and participated in the organization of unions and the political struggle for the New Deal. They had objective, realistic reason for hope.

The first phase of the New Deal, supported by American business ... gave recognition to an old corporate dream-economy planned by business. The second phase of the New Deal (The worst of today's welfare theory and antipoverty wisdom)

moved away from the concept of planning and toward a "free market." The assumption was that in its intervention the government should not plan but should stimulate the economy and that the private sector and initiative would continue to be the mainspring of progress.

After the Second World, the government started emphasizing training programs because some workers were not participating in the general economic advance. However, these training programs have missed the fundamental problem. The novelty of impoverishment today is that it takes place in a time of automation. The government offers education and training and at the same time admits that the jobs for its graduates are obsolete. Such hypocrisy reinforces the cynicism and resistance to organization which characterizes poor communities.

It is therefore crucial that the federal government generate jobs and create an environment of economic hope. The essence of the "third phase" of the New Deal would be social investment, a conscious and political allocation of resources to meet public needs. This New Deal would be dependent upon a coalition, which would include, but not be confined to, the poor, that would see to it that planning and social investment were extended in a democratic way.

Application of the Great Books Questioning Model

Opening Questions:

1. Propose a title for the passage. What is your title?

2. What audience would be interested in reading the passage? Why do you think so?

3. How would President Bush react to this passage? Why?

4. What public figures would agree with the perspective in the passage? Would any of our American presidents?

Core-Examining Central Points:

1. According to the passage is it possible for:

   a. poverty to be abolished?

   b. America to return to pre-World War II levels of economic opportunity?

   c. poverty to be reduced in the current free market atmosphere?

   d. job training programs to solve the problem of poverty?

   e. America's poor today to have economic hope?

2. How would you rank order the following ideas for dealing with poverty in America based on the perspective of the author of this passage?

   be more competitive in the world marketplace

   stimulate the economy

   create coalitions of support for social investment

   return to earlier phases of the New Deal

   let business plan the economy

   reduce hopelessness among the poor

Which did you rank first? Why?

Which did you rank last? Why?

Closing—Relating to the World:

1. If fighting poverty requires "social investment," how might such an approach be undertaken?

2. At what levels can this concept of "social investment" be employed? (Neighborhoods, social community, states, at a global level)

3. How "marketable" is this idea in today's world?

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THE READING ROOM

Welcome to the Reading Room's first mini-series. Here and in our next visit we will discuss books that relate to a side of giftedness too many people either fail to understand or prefer to overlook – the unusual emotional sensitivity that so often goes along with unusual intelligence. Many books for young readers center around gifted characters who exhibit this sensitivity in their ability to empathize with others and their concern about large moral and philosophical issues.

Our first book is a collection of short stories rather than a novel. *Badger on the Barge and Other Stories* (available as a Penguin Puffin paperback) is by British writer Janni Howker. Each story focuses on a boy or girl who feels in some way isolated and who interacts with an older person – often a very old person. In the title story Helen, a young teen whose family has been traumatized by the death of her older brother, meets an ill, elderly woman when she delivers a charity food basket to the canal barge where the woman lives. Repelled at first by the woman's age and vinegary character, she is intrigued by the badger the woman is caring for. It is the badger that brings the two together, but it is Helen's ability to empathize with and relate to the older woman that allows a relationship to develop, to the benefit of both.

In "Reicher" a boy, with his friend, torments an old German, calling him a Nazi, shouting "Heil Hitler" and following him with verbal abuse. When he finds himself interacting with him and learns more about him, he becomes appalled not only by his own behavior but by the hatred and prejudice of the social environment that encourages such attacks.

In "The Egg-Man" a girl joins another in teasing an elderly mentally disturbed neighbor and finds herself thrust into the tragedy of his life that explains his strangeness. As she empathizes with his pain, she rejects her friend's continuing attitude of condescension and distaste.

In each story the child, through his or her ability to empathize with someone different, comes to a more mature understanding of some vital human value.

In my own book, *Pride of the Peacock*, 14 year old Whitney Whitehurst reads Jonathan Schell's *Fate of the Earth* and becomes obsessed with nuclear war. Her vivid imagination conjures horrific images of death and disaster and her fear isolates her from friends and family, who refuse to confront the issue or take it seriously. Everywhere she turns she sees violence used as a solution to problems and she despairs that humans will be able to break that pattern to avoid their own destruction. Unable to find a way to work through her fears, Whitney essentially closes down, trying to stop herself from thinking and feeling.

She meets Theodora Bourke, a sculptor who is, herself, running from violence. The two work together to create a new garden from an overgrown ruin on the grounds of Bourke's estate. Through their growing relationship, their encouragement of new life, and the breathtaking beauty of Bourke's pet peacock each begins to help the other find a way to affirm humanity.

Gifted children frequently take world issues into their own lives, flirting with despair or taking on moral causes that other children are scarcely aware of. And gifted children are likely to be able to relate to adults, to take and give comfort in ways that other children simply do not. These books provide a forum for a discussion of the effects of these differences.

Stephanie Tolan, from Waterford, New York, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child.*

was verified. He was reading small books before the age of two.

At 8 years 3 months of age, Hadley was tested on the *Stanford-Binet* and was assessed as having a mental age of 14 years 8 months, and an IQ of 178. He is one of a small minority of gifted youth who have come to be described as "exceptionally gifted" – those children who score at or above 160 IQ. Estimates of the rarity of these children vary from 1 in 10,000 to 1 in 30,000 (Marland, 1972).

Parents and teachers can usually cope with moderately gifted children – those with IQs between 120-139. With understanding and flexibility, schools can generally manage to respond adequately to the needs of highly gifted children (140-159 IQ). Indeed, Leta Hollingworth (1942), one of the foremost researchers of the intellectually gifted in the 1920s and 1930s, defined the IQ range of 125-155 as socially "optimum intelligence" (p. 264). She found children scoring within this range to be emotionally well-balanced and controlled, of good character, and able to win the confidence and friendship of age-peers. Hollingworth noted, however, that above 160 IQ the difference between the gifted child and his or her age-peers was so great that it led to special problems of development which were correlated with social isolation. These problems, furthermore, seemed more acute at ages 4 through 9.

Unfortunately for exceptionally gifted children and their parents, Hollingworth's findings still hold true. Where children of truly exceptional intellectual potential have not been provided with a peer group of children of similar abilities, they tend to be isolated and withdrawn, preferring to play complex, self-invented games by themselves, burying themselves in reading, or creating imaginary companions or imaginary countries to create the illusion of friendship and companionship denied them in real life. However, psychologists, such as Janos (1983), emphasize that this social isolation is not the isolation of emotional disturbance; rather, it is caused by the absence of a suitable peer group with whom to relate. It is not the children's giftedness, but other children's response to it, which creates the problem.

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

The remarkable abilities of the exceptionally gifted can become obvious very early in life. The majority start to speak and walk significantly earlier than children of average ability. In the current study of Australian children of IQ 160 + (Gross, 1989), the average age at which the children spoke their first word other than "Mama," "Dada" or other "babble" sounds was 9 months, as compared to 12 months in the general population. Some of the children spoke at remarkably early ages. Koko, an Australian Malaysian boy, could call family members, including the cat and dog, by name, at the age of 4 months! Adam spoke his first word at 5 months and by 7 months was providing a running commentary on the grocery items as his mother wheeled him around the supermarket. Jade was speaking at 5 months, talking in sentences before her first birthday, and walking around unassisted at 10 months. Both early movement and early speech contribute significantly to the exceptionally gifted child's capacity to acquire and process information, and serve to strengthen crystallized intelligence.

One of the most powerful indications of exceptional giftedness is the early development of reading.

Parents of the exceptionally gifted are often astounded by the remarkable feats of memory these children display. Ian, who at 9 years of age was assessed as having an IQ of 200, could sing "My Grandfather's Clock" all the way through before the age of two. The parents in the study report that their children were able to recite or sing several nursery rhymes without error before 18 months (Gross, 1989). The speed of information processing and recall of these young children facilitates remarkably swift and accurate learning when they enter pre-school or kindergarten.

DEVELOPMENT OF READING

One of the most powerful indications of exceptional giftedness is the early development of reading. Ten of the 12 children of 180 + IQ studied by Hollingworth (1942) were reading before the age of 4, as were no fewer than 55% of 270 students aged 13 and 14, who were finalists in the 1982 Mid-West Talent Search (VanTassel-Baska, 1983). In the Australian study, "reading" was defined as the ability to decode and comprehend more than 5 words from a printed source without the use of pictures as textual clues. Of the exceptionally gifted young Australians, fully 97% were reading before the age of 5, and an amazing 60% were reading at or before the age of 2 (Gross, 1989).

Parents of gifted youth are generally great lovers of reading, and seek to instill that love in their children. Mothers of the highly gifted tend to read to their children from an early age. Not surprising, a high proportion of the children respond with a passionate interest in books. In many cases, "books" or "read" appears among the first words the exceptionally gifted child learns to say. Many parents report that their exceptionally gifted toddler demanded to be read to at every opportunity.

On her first birthday she was given Dr. Seuss's ABC Book which she loved me to read to her over and over again because of the (Continued on page 8)

funny rhymes. I must have read it hundreds of times. I can picture Roshni toddling towards me with her arm outstretched to me holding a book. It was a pastime that we both enjoyed because it meant, for me, a time when I didn't have to rack my brains for something else to keep her occupied and happy, and one where I could sit down and be completely relaxed."

Sarah, mother of 6-year-old Roshni (162 IQ).

It is often assumed that children who read early have invariably been taught by their parents. Research suggests, however, that the majority of exceptionally gifted children learn to read by themselves (Gross, 1989). Often their parents are astonished and disturbed to find that their child has "picked up" reading from street or supermarket signs, TV or press advertisements, or children's educational programs on television, long before the parents would have expected the child to be ready. The early reading of math prodigy Terence Tao, before the age of 2, came as a complete surprise to his parents; they found him playing with another child's alphabet blocks, arranging the letters in alphabetical order. Some of the blocks had numbers and the Taos discovered that Terry could arrange them in numerical order and, shortly afterwards, do simple addition and subtraction. Terry had taught himself to read and count by watching *Sesame Street*.

EARLY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

Because of the early development of reading, many exceptionally gifted children have acquired, by the time they enter school, the reading and comprehension skills of children at least 3 years older. By the time they are 5 years of age, they have access, through books, newspapers and magazines in the home, to an "information bank" normally reserved for children several years their senior. Their excellent memories, their early development of speech, and their skill in reading, combine to give them a vocabulary which is rich, mature and unusually sophisticated. Ian, aged 2 years 3 months, startled adult friends of his parents by announcing, "My father is a mathematician and my mother is a physiotherapist" (Gross, 1989, p. 115). They are strikingly different, in many ways, from their age-peers of average ability. Exceptional intellectual giftedness is usually easy to identify in children before school age who have not yet been taught to underachieve or conceal their abilities.

Problems may start, however, when the child enters preschool, or begins to interact on a regular basis with other children of his or her chronological age. Because of their accelerated intellectual and social development, gifted children tend to be less egocentric than their age-peers. At a stage when young children's view of ability or achievement tends to be self-referenced ("I couldn't do that yesterday but, gee, look at me today!") the gifted child has often moved on to a norm-referenced understanding of ability as performance measured against the attainment standards of one's peers:

> *"When I'm playing with Mike and Trevor, and Mom gives us candy, I count the candy and share it out equally, but Mike and Trevor don't seem to understand what I'm doing. It's like they don't know what counting is."* (Jared, age 4)

Because of this, highly gifted children may become aware, very quickly, that they are different, in many ways, from the other children around them. However, contrary to popular myth, this does not lead to conceit or feelings of superiority. Rather, gifted children may feel acutely uncomfortable, and may act swiftly to change their behavior to "fit in" with that of their friends. Jared may stop counting out the candy, and revert to taking a handful as Mike and Trevor are doing, in order to conform to the social and behavioral norms of his age-group.

The problem of salience, or visible difference, may become particularly acute when the child enters school. All but one of the exceptionally gifted young Australians were reading on school entry at levels significantly beyond their chronological age. Yet, 66% of the parents reported that their children spontaneously *stoped reading* or deliberately decreased the quality and quantity of their reading, after a few weeks at school. Within 4 weeks of entering school, Hadley Bond, who had been reading since the age of 18 months, had begun to copy his classmates in selecting picture books, or books with only a few words of text, from classroom bookshelves.

> ***Yet, 66% of the parents reported that their children spontaneously stopped reading or deliberately decreased the quality and quantity of their reading, after a few weeks at school.***

In his first few months of school, Ian began to mimic the oral reading of his classmates. He would mumble and tumble over words to such a degree that his teacher remained quite unaware that only a few months previously he had been assisting his preschool teacher by reading aloud to the class. In the majority of cases the children's teachers were quite unaware that they had, indeed, been reading on school entry.

The parents of exceptionally gifted young children often feel quite insecure about their children's phenomenal abilities. They have generally been exposed to, and may have (Continued on page 9)

believed, the myths that predict that extremely gifted children will, as a result of their giftedness, suffer social and emotional distress in adulthood. They may already have been accused of "pushing" their child by friends or relatives who have observed the child's accelerated reading development, and have attributed this to surreptitious teaching on the part of the parents. For many reasons they may lack the confidence to discuss the situation with their child's teacher.

The majority of the Australian parents of children who stopped reading on school entry decided not to mention the problem to the child's teacher for fear that they would be disbelieved and their child penalized by the teacher in retaliation (Gross, 1989). These parents then watched with concern as their child worked through weeks of "reading readiness" exercises while, at home, he or she read books normally enjoyed by 7 or 8 year olds; yet, they did not have the confidence to explain to the teacher that her reading program was not suited to the needs of their child.

If the teacher does not use standardized tests of achievement to assess the child's level of reading development, and bases her perception of his reading aptitude on his performance in class, the child may spend his first year in school reading at a level 3 or 4 years below his true capacity. **It is extremely important that parents of exceptionally gifted young children share with the school, honestly and fully, the child's developmental history and his or her current level of achievement in reading and mathematics.**

SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR THE EXCEPTIONALLY GIFTED

Educators concerned for the needs of the intellectually and physically handicapped often argue that these children should be placed in "the least restrictive environment." For many advocates of integration, this is seen as the regular classroom, where the handicapped child may interact in work and play with age peers, and be exposed to a broader or more enriched curriculum than might be possible in the environment of a special class or special school. Ironically, however, the regular classroom is not necessarily the least restrictive environment for the intellectually gifted. From her lifetime of study of extremely gifted children, Leta Hollingworth was certain of this.

> *In the ordinary elementary school situation children of 140 IQ waste half their time. Those of 170 IQ waste practically all of their time. (Hollingworth, 1942, p. 299)*

Virtually every educator and psychologist knowledgeable of the special needs of the gifted has stressed that to optimize the intellectual and social development of the gifted, these children must be placed, for at least part of the time, in some form of special grouping that permits them to interact with other children of like abilities and interests. This is even more important for the exceptionally gifted than for their moderately gifted counterparts. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly recognized that the exceptionally gifted child requires an educational program which differs in structure, pace and content from that which might be offered to moderately gifted age peers. A child of 190 IQ differs intellectually from moderately gifted children of 130 IQ to the same degree that the latter differ from intellectually handicapped children of 70 IQ.

A pull-out program of math enrichment may be a valid and appropriate response to the educational needs of Martin, who in Grade 3 is capable of working at Grade 5 level in math, and who delights in number games and problem solving. However, for his classmate, Ian baker, who at age 9 scored 560 on the *Scholastic Aptitude Test-Mathematics (SAT-M)*, almost a whole standard deviation above the mean on a test standardized on college bound high school seniors – a pull-out enrichment program is an inadequate response both intellectually and socially. It is doubtful whether Ian would find in his pull-out group another child who would come anywhere close to his achievement level in math, or who would be able to discuss with Ian the highly sophisticated algebraic concepts which are his current passion. A more appropriate educational response to Ian's phenomenal talent would be to place him in a full time self-contained class of intellectually gifted students and allow him to progress at his own pace, or to design for him an individualized program with a strong element of acceleration.

When an exceptionally gifted child is placed in a heterogeneous classroom where few other children are intellectually gifted, she is likely to be ostracized by her classmates. Her academic achievement levels, her interests which are often like those of a child many years her senior, her advanced vocabulary, her tendency to think in abstract concepts instead of concrete examples, her accelerated moral development, and the way she views the world, are so different from those of her age mates that there is likely to be very little point of contact between her and the other children with whom she has to interact day by day. In contrast, when such a child is removed from the regular classroom and placed with a group of children whose intellectual capacities are closer to her own, the mockery and social rejection cease and the child is accepted happily by her new classmates. Hollingworth (1942) tells of "Child C," a boy of 190 IQ, who was consistently rejected by other children until he was transferred to a special full time class for gifted children where the median IQ was 164. In this class he was able, for the first time, to make social contacts with his classmates, and after a *(Continued on page 10)*

year or so he was one of the most popular class members. "Child C" had been removed from the "restrictive environment" of the regular classroom into an intellectual and social atmosphere in which his differences were tolerated and understood, and his particular talents and abilities could flourish.

Exceptionally gifted children whose academic achievement levels are several years in advance of their chronological age, and who are also socially and emotionally mature, are ideal candidates for acceleration. Teachers and school administrators are often concerned that acceleration may result in social difficulties when the child reaches adolescence or adulthood; however, 40 years of research on acceleration has failed to find a single study which suggests that lasting social or emotional damage results from well planned acceleration programs (Robinson, 1983). Rather, researchers suggest that we should be more concerned with the maladaptive effects on the highly able child of years of forced underachievement and social isolation (Feldhusen, 1983). For the exceptionally gifted child, skipping one year of school may not be sufficient. A child such as Hadley Bond, who at age 7 had the math achievement levels of a 14 year old, may need to skip two or even three grades in his school career if he is to come anywhere near to achieving his academic and social potential. Currently Hadley, aged 8, has been accelerated by two years and is working happily and successfully in grade 4 while, in addition, being permitted subject acceleration in math. "After two years of unbelievable boredom and being rejected by the other kids for being different, he has at last come into his own," says Holly Bond. "He is in a social wonderland."

Exceptionally gifted elementary and junior high school children who have experienced radical acceleration (acceleration by 3 or more years beyond chronological age) have significantly higher levels of social and general self esteem than do children of equal intellectual ability who have been retained with age peers in the regular classroom, or who have been permitted a "token" acceleration of one year (Gross, 1989). The young accelerates had higher levels of motivation, were much less likely to underachieve for peer or teacher acceptance, had more positive attitudes toward school, and believed that they were more warmly regarded by classmates and teachers, than did the non-accelerates. In contrast, the non-accelerates displayed disturbingly low levels of social self esteem, were more likely to report social rejection by their classmates, and admitted that they frequently underachieved in class in an attempt to reduce their classmates' and teachers' dislike of them. The importance of motivation and self esteem to the achievement of intellectual potential is indisputable. Many exceptionally gifted youth are given no chance to experience the self-fulfillment that comes with full expansion and utilization of their remarkable abilities. We owe it to our most gifted young people to assist them to develop their potential to the fullest. They will repay us.

Author's Note: None of the names used is this manuscript are real names except that of Terence Tao whose parents authorized the use of his real name.

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(Continued from page 1) before any plans for the education of the gifted were implemented in this state. Therefore, in [illegible], I visited the United States and conferred with Dr. Halbert Robinson, Director of the Seattle Project in Washington, and Dr. Virginia Ehrlich, Director of the Astor Program in New York City. These were two of the leading programs for developing giftedness in early childhood.

IDENTIFYING THE GIFTED

It is generally acknowledged that identification should include all the pertinent information which can be gathered about a subject. In practice, the best has to be made of available information and associated procedures. Most experts agree that as many identification procedures as possible should be used in conjunction, as no single process is reliable enough to determine ability. Screening for ability and potential should logically precede the selection of children for *(Continued on page 11)*

inclusion in special programs; the final selection should also take into account personality and environmental factors.

In identifying and nurturing very young, highly precocious infants and preschool children in the Seattle project, Robinson (1980) relied on family initiative to contact the University of Washington, after the announcement of the study appeared in a local newspaper. He stipulated that, for the group designated as extraordinary in specific abilities, the criterion was a high score on tests such as the Wechsler Block Design or Mazes. For the group designated as high in general intellectual skills, the criterion was a gifted range score on the *Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (Form L-M)*.

In the Astor program, Ehrlich (1980) said that she had considerable success using in part identification by parents, followed by psychological testing and an interview. She used the *Stanford-Binet (Form L-M)* also. Her reasons for using it were that it has excellent credentials of reliability and validity, that it does a better job of identifying intellectual giftedness in such populations as minorities than other tests, and that the test taps factors associated with developmental patterns of growth and is, therefore, more culture free than the subjective judgments required by questionnaires and checklists. She found that 2/3 of the parents who nominated their children as gifted were accurate. I found that 48 out of 50 parents in Tasmania were accurate.

I also chose the *Stanford Binet (Form L-M)* plus a couple subtests from the Wechsler Scale, The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) which can be given to children from 2 1/2 years of age and has alternate forms to facilitate repeated measures, and the Neale Test of Reading Ability. A unique feature of the Neale Test is the use of pictures to set the scene for each narrative rather than to illustrate details. The test has been transformed into a picture story book, and it provokes spontaneous conversation in some children which may be helpful to the examiner. Alternate forms of the test are provided to facilitate repeated measures.

PROGRAMMING OPTIONS

Since 1974, the Astor Program has introduced the practice of accepting gifted children to kindergarten at age 4 with pleasing results: all gains made over a nine month period, by both boys and girls, were highly significant and consistent for all tests (Ehrlich, 1980). Ehrlich concluded that intervention and early education of gifted children did make a substantial difference in both the affective and cognitive domains. And that was the case with my sample of 3 1/2 to 5 1/2 year olds, as well.

One type of intervention recommended for the gifted is acceleration, which the research literature tends to favor as supporting academic progress and effectively facilitating personal and social development. Grouping *per se* may not foster achievement and the realization of potential, but when grouping is used in conjunction with a suitable enrichment program such benefits should result. This was my assumption when I undertook my study.

FINDING TASMANIAN CHILDREN

I owe a lot in the design of my program to Robinson and Ehrlich. However, the constraints imposed by the local conditions required modifications in my research. I advertised in a local newspaper (which also published articles about giftedness supplied by me), and gave radio and television interviews about the intended project. *(Cont'd on page 12)*

CHECKLIST OF CHARACTERISTICS OF GIFTEDNESS

- Reacts positively to new, strange or mysterious elements in his/her environment (77%).
- Persists in examining and exploring stimuli to know more about them (66%).
- Is curious, investigative, asks penetrating questions (81%).
- Has unusual approach to problem solving and unusual solutions (68%).
- Is independent, individualistic, self-sufficient (86%).
- Is imaginative, fantasy-creating, a story-teller (86%).
- Possesses superior powers of reasoning, of dealing with abstractions, of generalizing from specific facts, of understanding meanings, and of seeing relationships (70%).
- Is full of ideas, verbal, has conversational fluency (86%).
- Prefers complex ideas; is irritated or bored by routine (70%).
- Can occupy time usefully without being stimulated (84%).
- Has a strong and persistent sense of humor (77%).
- Had early walking, talking, reading, etc. (88%).
- Is superior in the quantity and quality of vocabulary as compared with other children of his/her own age (88%).
- Learns easily and readily (88%).
- Has a wide range of interests and hobbies (81%).
- Has keen powers of observation (81%).
- Shows initiative and originality in intellectual and other work (81%).
- Has unusual memory (100%).
- Is superior in mathematics, particularly in problem solving (70%).
- Has great interest in the nature of humanity and the universe or origins and destiny (77%).
- Is interested in puzzles, mazes, etc. (62%).
- Other characteristics or special skills considered pertinent: (a) music (59%); (b) dance and sport (70%); (c) e.s.p. (20%); (d) drawing and painting (46%); (e) construction and technical pursuits (66%); (f) leadership (44%); (g) puppets, plays (40%); (h) chess, judo, mastermind, other (46%).

Applications were received by telephone. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes, during which parents replied to a checklist and, on the basis of information supplied, were told about the project and invited to bring their children for testing and to show sample products. All pre-testing was carried out at my office. Testing took about two hours for each child. This was followed by an additional brief parent interview. In the checklist (on p. 11), numbers in parentheses represent percentage of positive answers of 45 parents whose children were finally selected for the project.

All the relevant information was then reviewed (referrals, tests, products, parents' checklist and confidential information). All eligible children were then randomly assigned to one of three groups of 15 each.

THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Several teachers were interviewed for this project and a final selection was made based on qualifications and experience, plus an expressed desire to work with gifted children. In all cases, it was a new experience for them so I gave training sessions to the teachers, covering identification, characteristics, models, programs, observations, materials, parent-teacher relations, forms, etc.

During the intervention, the structured (T1) and unstructured (T2) groups used the same type of rooms, materials and resource people under the direction of different teachers.

T1 (structured): Teacher says: "Today we will do . . . The group charts will tell you when and where you go to an activity."

T2 (unstructured: Teacher says: "Today we have . . You may choose what to do. Put a sticker on the board when you have completed an activity."

C (control): No contact with researcher or teachers during experimental period. *(When the experiment was finished and the delayed post-test completed, these children received the same intervention as the experimental groups.)*

Following the guidelines of Ehrlich (1980) and Robinson (1980), the goals of the program were few, yet all-encompassing in terms of lifetime values:

- To teach basic skills as soon as the child was ready and at a pace compatible with his/her capacities;
- To teach thinking skills, from the simplest to the most complex, at the maximum level of the child's capacities;
- To promote a sense of social and civic responsibility, based on a socially acceptable value system;
- To experience the joys of learning.

Gifted children need to learn early how to learn – how to find out for themselves. These skills were taught and encouraged by use of reference materials, resource people and field research.

Besides the normal preschool activities, the intervention included vocabulary growth, reading, creating original stories, models, painting, composition, a study of several topics – such as democracy, architecture, the past, the present and the future – social responsibility and awareness of critical problems in society which require solutions.

> *... unlike other attributes, giftedness is a quality which for the most part is latent and, if undiscovered, remains unpolished.*

Throughout the intervention, the program stressed communication skills in conversation and in discussion, social responsibility, intellectual expansion and exploration, and joyful response to natural and spontaneous curiosity. Interwoven with all learning was stress on the children's affective development.

The curriculum was three-pronged:

1) typical curriculum for preschool;
2) special curriculum developed by teacher and researcher to cater to children's interests and needs;
3) part of the Astor Program by Ehrlich.

The curriculum topics included:

Who am I?
Where am I?
What am I?
Why am I?

These were the themes around which basic skills were developed.

Though always aware of the children's ages and social and physical maturity levels, the teachers responded to their highly advanced thinking and understanding skills. The level of difficulty of concepts and vocabulary was dictated and circumscribed by the pupils and not by anyone's preconceived notions of what these limits may be. At all times the teachers endeavored to make advanced material accessible to the pupils in a format they could enjoy, retaining the low-key atmosphere of the preschool.

I kept in close touch with parents, and observed the children at home as well as at the preschool, taping and photographing activities, collecting products and keeping an anecdotal diary. The teachers kept comprehensive diaries and observations on each child and wrote extensive individual reports.

Parents' participation was voluntary but encouraged, and an attendance list was kept as well as a record of their contributions to specific activities. I was available to answer parents' questions and provide them with reading material throughout *(Continued on page 13)*

the project. Informal meetings took place daily for 10 minutes with each experimental group of parents. Several social and informational evenings were organized with invited speakers.

Both parents and children completed a questionnaire at the end of the experiment.

RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENT

It was predicted that there would be a significant difference between the scores of the experimental groups and the control group, with greater enthusiasm for learning and development in the social, affective and academic areas in the experimental groups. It was also predicted that the parents would become aware of the changes in their children, and would be more inclined to continue some of the activities undertaken during the intervention. These predictions were fulfilled, as indicated by the delayed post-test nine months later. Immediately afterwards, the control group was offered the successful program.

Eight years later I was able to trace 34 of the children. The parents of 32 agreed to answer questionnaires and here are some of the outcomes: 22 children were in private schools (13 on scholarships); 10 children were in state schools; 12 out of 32 hate school (4 from private, and 8 from state schools). Their current interests are revealed in the accompanying chart.

In closing, I would like to recommend that parents use the checklist to evaluate their own children. If a child fits 3/4 of the characteristics, contact a professional for advice and assessment and alert the school of the test results. Parents should work together to gain needed programs for young gifted children.

INTERESTS OF 32 GIFTED CHILDREN

No. of Children	*Interested in*
17	Reading, music
11	Sports *(general)*, drama
7	Foreign languages, computers, science *(general)*, hockey, tennis, cricket, maths, football, art *(general)*.
4	Story writing, animals, debating, swimming, basketball, stamp collecting, current affairs, soccer, cooking, traveling, dancing, drawing, bushwalking.
2	Home economics, skateboarding, conservation, fishing, coin collecting, peace movement, judo, horse riding, technical drawing, model making, sailing, martial arts, cycling, inventing, TV, surfing, quizzes, canoe building and canoeing, biology, electronics, water skiing, camping, cartoons, chemistry, watercolor painting, scouts, photography.
1	Helping handicapped people, puzzles, bowling, jetskiing, gardening, motor cars, softball, making money!

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Kathi Kearney

THE HIGHLY GIFTED

Finding Highly Gifted Children (Part II)

Seven-year-old Joshua, who had demonstrated many of the early signs of advanced development common in highly gifted children, was taken by his parents to a private psychologist for an evaluation. Using the **Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, Form L-M,** *the psychologist estimated his IQ at above 180, and said that in her ten years of practice, Joshua was the brightest child she had ever tested. But three years later, when Joshua's school instituted a program for gifted children, Joshua was not selected. The reason? Bored in school, Joshua had become a troublemaker in class and refused to complete his homework. His teacher had not given him a strong recommendation. However, based on his group achievement test scores, the gifted program's screening committee referred him to the school psychologist for individual testing, since they were unsure whether or not he should be included in the program. Using the* **Stanford-Binet Fourth Edition,** *Joshua's IQ score was 128, six points below the cutoff score for inclusion into the program, and almost sixty points below his score on the* Stanford-Binet Form L-M.

Joshua's parents, who had not shared the earlier test results with the school until now, brought a copy of the test report with them to a meeting with the school psychologist and the coordinator of the gifted program. But they were told that the earlier test used norms that were now outdated, that the Fourth Edition's latest norms were the most accurate, and that Joshua did not qualify for the gifted program.

Joshua's case is less unusual that it might seem. Highly gifted children, especially those who in former years would have been identified as very high-IQ children, are difficult to identify, for two reasons: Many current programs for the gifted are based on conceptions of giftedness requiring a strong element of achievement motivation, and current test instruments (including the *WISC-R*, *Stanford-Binet Fourth Edition*, and *K-ABC*) consistently underestimate the abilities of this group (Silverman, 1989). Vernon (1987) states that for gifted children, "...the *L-M* is often preferable to the Wechsler scale..." (p. 256).

How can the demands for the use of the newest test norms be balanced with a need for appropriate identification of very highly gifted children? First, Richert (1982) notes in the *National Report on Identification* that

> *"...new instruments and methods need to be developed for identification of gifted students in specific populations, such as disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, students with limited English-speaking ability, exceptionally gifted students and handicapped students" (pp. 77-78, emphasis added).*

If alternate methods of identification are acceptable for other special populations of gifted children, certainly the use of the *Stanford-Binet (Form L-M)*, a valid instrument with the added plus of a distinctive research history with this particular special population, should be acceptable as one method of identifying the highly gifted. Second, the *Stanford-Binet (Form L-M)* can be used as a supplementary identification and diagnostic measure "when a child obtains *three* [or more] subtest scores at or near the ceiling of any current instrument" (Silverman and Kearney, 1989, p. 48). Such a strategy insures that highly gifted children with extraordinary strengths in verbal and abstract reasoning will have an additional opportunity to be identified and intervention provided in the critical early childhood years, without having to wait for the talent searches commonly conducted at the junior high level.

However we may feel about the use of IQ tests or expanded definitions of giftedness, it is worth noting that when a child *does* score as high as 160, 170, or 180 on the *Stanford-Binet (Form L-M)* we are looking at an extraordinary performance. If we are committed to the use of inclusionary measures to identify the gifted, we cannot exclude children who demonstrate their giftedness in this way, especially when the concomitants of extraordinary giftedness sometimes work, paradoxically, to prevent these children from receiving appropriate educational services (See Brown, 1984).

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ADOLESCENT PASSAGES

How Unique Are Talented Adolescents? (Part I)

Perspectives We Take as Parents and Teachers

During the fall I led a weekly series of seminars for a group of talented young adolescents from some nearby school districts. It was a voluntary support group for young teens to explore some of the prominent issues related to their age, talents, schools, and families. It was not a therapy group *per se*, but we all worked hard at times to try to resolve some of the sticky problems our members encountered.

From the beginning, I wanted to make sure we got into some of the thorny bushes that typically snag adolescents in pursuit of developing their talents. Naturally, my intentions were sometimes overturned by a pressing personal problem brought by a member. In our fourth or fifth session, one 14 year old finally said: "When are we going to talk about our REAL problems?" I wondered which ones he was thinking about that the group had not yet gotten around to. "You know – family stuff, problems with girls, not liking your homework or your brother, fighting with one of your parents."

Some group members nodded their assent. Others disagreed: "That's what we're talking about all the time, isn't it?" Lots of eyes stared at me. Hmmm. Maybe it WASN'T, I thought to myself. It's time to dig a little deeper into the lives of the group and see how the talent piece really fit.

What is Unique?

Each of us has a unique perspective for how we view the world, our own lives, and those of the young people we parent or teach. My own is a bit of a crazy quilt: educator, clinician, parent, artist and writer. Not to mention "historian." After all, like you, I am historian of my own growth and development. When I observe and share in the lives of children and adolescents, I cannot help but do it with all of these sets of "eyes" at my disposal.

I approach the young people I work with and counsel with my own bias: I see them as unique adolescents, rapidly developing at home and school, and quite capable of considerable growth, insight, and achievement. Put another way, I see young people as unique, as talented, and probably first and foremost, as *adolescents*.

Researchers of human development have particular biases too. They like to uncover patterns, draw comparisons, and toss out for closer scrutiny a few hypotheses about how particular issues might be handled at various ages. The puzzle patterns seem vast, defying synthesis at times: age, sex, race, birth order, family structure, IQ, physical status, medical and family history. An endless array of potential clues. Any piece, no matter how unlikely, has the potential to map the entire picture into focus.

Between 1975 and today, developmental psychologists, educators, and pediatricians have struggled to make a clear case for the uniqueness of adolescence. Rooted in findings from several large longitudinal studies of thousands of young people from age 12 to 20, a new profile of the adolescent passage has emerged. Rather than being a time of stress, conflict, and alienation, adolescence is now more broadly defined in ways that emphasize the unique path chosen by every individual.

Some large patterns of growth, adjustment, stress, and need are now perceptible. In this context, I hope to explore some essential questions that puzzle many of us. For example, how unique are the various issues that affect adolescents from one age to the next? Do normal processes of adolescence, like separating from the family and becoming an "individual" unduly exhibit all [illegible] for adolescents with exceptionalities of any sort? Do exceptionality processes adolescents experience and resolve their adolescence differently than less capable peers? Does the presence of artistic or musical talent signal a unique developmental path? Are there real psychological differences between talented adolescents and their peers?

A Starting Point

Painters also like Renaissance men expected to view the world as their canvases through the imaginary grid of the so-called "Golden Rectangle," an [illegible] arrangement of objects and persons in space that created a visually pleasing array. Their painterly rectangles dictated the placement of subjects in various grounds and planes that were complementary.

You and I have similar "golden rectangles" for differentiating figure-ground relationships in the phenomena we observe. Parents, with a lengthy history of relationships with teenaged sons and daughters, grasp their adolescents' "uniqueness" one way, while teachers and counselors, with a different kind of history, measure them slightly differently.

The next two segments of this column will explore some of the figure-ground differences that exist in current views of talented adolescents. I hope you will feel welcome to comment from your own perspective about the talented young people you live and work with these days.

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BRIGHT BEGINNINGS:

The Prodigy Phenomenon (Part I)

In China several years ago, an extraordinarily gifted child artist captured public awareness for the first time. Wang Yani's delightful paintings of monkeys, imaginatively rendered in a variety of scenes and activities, showed a sense of composition, color, and technique rivaling that of adult professional artists.

Born in 1975, Yani began painting when she was two and one-half years old (Ho, 1989). By the time she was three, she had progressed from simple scribbles to true animal forms. Incredibly committed to her art, she painted passionately and continuously every day until completely satisfied. By the time she was six, Yani had produced 4,000 paintings and had won national acclaim in China. Today, her works are displayed internationally.

Yani is an example of a child prodigy. The prodigy has been defined as a child who, before the age of 10, performs at the level of an adult professional in some cognitively demanding field (Feldman, 1986). Typically, prodigies exhibit single-minded, passionate devotion to their areas of interest and appear relentlessly drawn to develop their prodigious gifts. Most often, children show prodigious ability in only one area, although there has been at least one case of a child with multiple prodigious gifts (Feldman, 1986).

Intriguingly, research shows that a prodigy's abilities are not necessarily reflected in a comparably extraordinary IQ score. Measured IQs of prodigies have ranged from above average (but not strikingly so) to so high that they defy measurement capabilities of current instruments. Based on his study of six child prodigies, Feldman (1986) proposes that several factors combine to produce child prodigies. A discussion of some of these follows.

What Makes a Prodigy?

It is clear that would-be child prodigies must, first of all, be born with the intellectual and physical equipment necessary for extraordinary achievement in their to-be-chosen field. Additionally, however, the field itself must be attractive to a child's eye and child-accessible. "Accessibility," as used here, means that a field must be potentially meaningful to even a very young child whose worldly experience is minimal. Additionally, "accessibility" requires that the artifacts and activities associated with the field must be potentially manageable by children. Child prodigy violinists must have child-sized violins in order to develop their talent.

Perhaps partially because of this precondition of accessibility, fields from which child prodigies emerge are few. Most prodigies are seen in music performance and chess. Other types are rare, though there have been documented cases of writing prodigies and prodigies in the visual arts and mathematics.

Given a child with biologically-based potential and a field ripe for prodigy-making, one more ingredient is necessary—strong, focused environmental support. Generally, this originates with the parents. Often, a prodigy's parent serves as his or her first teacher and role model for the skills to be developed. So it was, for example, with Yani, whose earliest exposure to art was in her father's studio as he worked (Ho, 1989). A professional oil painter, Wang Shiqiang introduced his daughter to the tools and technique of her art. He also inspired her paintings through frequent trips to the zoo. They lingered near the monkey's cages for hours, Yani usually leaving reluctantly and tearfully.

When a prodigy's abilities develop beyond parental tutoring expertise, it falls to the parent to coordinate and facilitate the child's access to other teachers. Typically, the primary teacher is well-matched to the prodigy's needs—both in terms of personality and in terms of expertise in the prodigy's field.

Though prodigies take pleasure in exercising their talents, they and their families also invariably confront problems. Some of these will be discussed in the next issue.

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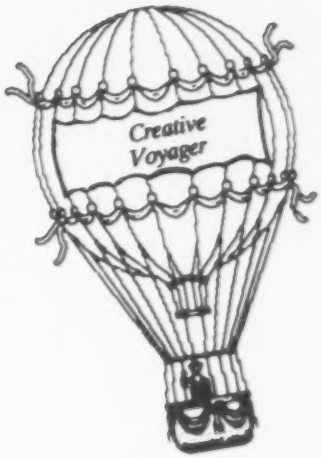
IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY



Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack
Tour Guide

On this journey readers may want to find a nice sunny place, lie back, and gaze at the clouds. We are going to daydream for awhile. In our rush to motivate gifted and talented students to be creatively productive, we may fail to allow these students critical phases of the creative process: time for imagining and reflection. For many years I began each school year by sharing with my gifted students a list of daydreams one gifted youth, Robert Goddard, created for himself at the age of 15. Goddard spent one summer listing the goals he wanted to accomplish in his lifetime. Goddard's list of 127 goals is shared in *Happy Birthday to U.S.* by Murray and Roberta Suid (1976). Goddard wanted to explore the Nile, Congo, and Amazon Rivers, visit the North and South Poles, make a parachute jump, publish an article in the *National Geographic*, milk a poisonous snake, and be able to light a match with a .22 caliber rifle. Goddard did not content himself with mere daydreams, however. **By the time he had reached the age of 47, he had achieved 103 of the goals he had set forth at age 15.**

After I shared Goddard's list of 127 goals, I asked each student to create his or her own list of 50 daydreams. The following is a representative list of vocational and avocational life goals that students created. I would like to:

- Argue a monumental case before the Supreme Court.
- Pitch a no-hitter in a World Series.
- Become president of the United States.
- Own 1,000 acres of wilderness land.
- Find the lost continent of Atlantis.
- Uncover a major political scandal.
- Compose a great piece of music.

Next, I asked each student to pretend that one of their daydreams had been realized and to find a creative way to communicate this fact. Some students wrote their own future obituaries that highlighted their life accomplishments. Others drew pictures of themselves accomplishing their goals. Often the crucial events in their future lives were celebrated on would-be future covers of *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *Sports Illustrated*.

The daydreams assignment offers students a challenge to think about the creative ways in which they want to spend their lives. It sends students rushing off to find encyclopedias and atlases to locate the names and places with which they desire to associate their lives. Not long ago a teacher in Vancouver shared her perceptions of gifted students as they worked on individual daydream books over a period of two months.

It is interesting to note that their daydreams have been honed from the acquisition of Porsches and Lamborghinis to the very core of their needs. One of my students, a foster child, abandoned the luxury cars finally and wrote that he wanted to be loved by one person forever. Shortly after, he was legally adopted. I, too, wrote a daydream book and enjoyed the opportunity to clarify my own life goals.

At home or in school, allow students time to imagine and dream about the many ways they want to both have an impact on, and interact with, the world. Imagination and reflection are both investments well made in the creative processes gifted children experience.

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ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

Julie is a gifted fourth grader who has been challenged since kindergarten through an outstanding program for the gifted and talented. Unfortunately, the program will be eliminated, as part of the district's move toward integrative programming. Julie's parents have been told that teachers will be aware of all special needs children and will provide for them in the regular classroom. Her parents are very concerned that faculty members have not yet had the opportunity to be inserviced in the new curriculum. They worry that Julie cannot experience the appropriate challenge she requires without support and resources from experts trained in gifted education.

As we move into the era of integrative education, the term "gifted" is being challenged. Should we give up the label, "gifted?" The push in education today is toward integrating all aspects of curriculum and student needs, so that every student is appropriately served. Who can argue with that? Challenging an educational system that portends to meet every child's needs is like opposing motherhood and apple pie. The reform movement is commendable, and I am optimistic that it will eventually be a positive force in education for ALL children.

The key word is "eventually." A basic systems change will take place in American education – eventually. However, what happens meanwhile to highly able students who are beyond the perimeter of the system? As established programs of gifted/talented education are moved out to make room for curriculum generalists, who will serve individual needs of gifted children? What happens to outstanding students who require intensive service beyond the existing framework?

The largest department store in my town is undergoing extensive remodeling. It hasn't closed down its shoe department or its clothing area. It still sells bedding and underwear. True, it's harder to find some of the merchandise, and the staff often has to make a special effort to continue the quality of its service. The store has posted signs apologizing for the inconvenience and assuring customers that their needs are still important.

The same attitude should prevail when a school district remodels its basic structure. The individual needs of its consumers cannot wait for such remodeling to be completed.

If educational reform is as ideal as it sounds, "eventually" we won't have to worry. But kids fall through cracks during construction. The proposed integrative model still has gaps, and they're large enough for children to be lost in.

A review of the literature by Hershey and Oliver (1988) produced the following:

1. It appears that teachers' perceptions of the label "gifted" became more positive as they had opportunities to interact with gifted students.

2. Peers of gifted students are influenced by the label "gifted," but only a small percentage of gifted students are bothered by the negative attitudes of their peers.

3. Overall, gifted students seem to have positive attitudes abut being labeled and about participating in special programs. (p. 33)

Yes, we need to support reform which will produce excellence in education. No, we are not ready to let go of the "gifted" label in terms of students and the programs they require.

Dorothy Knopper is State Consultant on the Gifted, Colorado Department of Education and "Open Space" columnist for *Roeper Review*.

(KALEIDOSCOPE *Continued from page 3)*

- Encouraging children to try new topics or activities "just for the fun of it," with no mention of grades or other evaluation.
- Helping children to notice their own successes – even small ones – with comments like: "What was your favorite part of this project?" and "Can you notice any change between your first and your latest attempt?"
- Relating our own embarrassing moments or mistakes, and talking about how silly they made us feel.

Sibling rivalry and comparisons are unavoidable, a natural part of growing up. In only-child families, comparisons still crop up, with friends, relatives or classmates used as the child's reference points. Often, though, these comparisons are part of a bigger picture, as the child is trying to link a developing self-concept to something real, like the performance of an older brother, sister or cousin. Understanding the importance of these comparisons will help parents see the bigger picture as it relates to the growth and development of self-concept in their children.

James Delisle, Ph.D. is Coordinator of Gifted Education, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio and author of *Gifted Children Speak Out*.

from parent to parent

Young gifted children present a special challenge almost as soon as they enter school. Parents are often stunned by the news that their child is not finishing assignments, and may suggest that the child doesn't finish the work because it's too easy. The teacher insists that the unfinished work is evidence that the child isn't developmentally ready or cannot attend to a task long enough to undertake projects requiring a long attention span and intense concentration.

Tom and Barbara Pelletier found a way to help their son's teacher see the problem differently. Rick, a highly gifted seven-year-old, attends a private school where he is enrolled in a 2nd/3rd grade combination classroom.

At one of their first meetings with the teacher, the Pelletiers met with resistance to the idea that Rick's work be of an accelerated nature. "Rick's teacher was still at a point where she thought that the reason his papers were not getting finished was because he **couldn't** finish them. Tom and I knew the real reason was he **wouldn't** finish them."

They agreed with the teacher that it was a problem, and offered a simple solution. "We suggested giving him a timer because we knew that he always responded well to a challenge such as 'I bet you can't clean your room in 15 minutes.'"

The investment required was small. "Barb and I bought a couple of inexpensive kitchen timers that count down from 99 minutes. We were a little concerned about the buzzer that sounded when time ran out, but Rick loved it. He knew that it was his job to keep that buzzer quiet and avoid disrupting the rest of the class."

There were a few glitches of course. At first Rick wanted to time everything. When the novelty of the timer wore off, he began pushing the "pause" button to take a break, (or give himself a competitive edge). And despite the fact that the timer had been equipped with a clip for his belt, a strap to hang around his neck, and a magnet to stick on the side of his desk, Rick did manage to misplace the timer for a day or two.

Barbara notes many benefits. "Rick can now estimate how long his homework will take him and decide how to budget his afternoon based on his estimate. In addition, he gets positive feedback from his teacher where he once got scoldings. And he now has free time for more challenging activities like using the computer. The best part is that he knows he did it himself – he was an active participant in the solution to his problem."

At Rick's next marking period his teacher felt much more willing to consider adjusting the curriculum. "Tom and I are pleased that his teacher now realizes 'lack of ability' was not the cause of the problem."

Lisa Ferguson is from Haverill, Massachusetts and the parent of highly gifted children.

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A two-week residential summer program for grades 5 through 12. For information contact: The Center for the Education and Study of the Gifted, Talented, and Creative, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado 80639. Phone (303) 351-2683. Deadline: June 1, 1990.

Dabrowski's Theory of Emotional Development and its Implications for Giftedness

June 6-10, 1990. A five-day intensive workshop will be held at Ashland University, Ashland, Ohio. Instructors include: Michael Piechowski, Northland College; Linda Silverman, Gifted Child Development Center; R. Frank Falk, and Nancy Miller, University of Akron. For more information contact: Dr. Jane Piirto, Ashland University, Ashland, OH 44805, (419) 289-5379.

High Ability Over the Life Span

June 21-23, 1990. The conference on giftedness through the life span is organized by the University of Utrecht, and will be held in Utrecht, The Netherlands (official language: English). Contact: Secretariat ECHA-conference, Dr. W.A.M.Kok, Secretary-General, ISOR afd. Onderwijsonderzoek, Heidelbergiaan 1, 3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands. Telephone: 030-534867 or 030-534555.

CONFRATUTE '90

The University of Connecticut School of Education presents a unique summer experience for educators and advocates of the gifted and talented on July 16-27, 1990. Registration information is available by writing to: Sally M. Reis, Coordinator, CONFRATUTE '90. The University of Connecticut, 231 Glenbrook Road, U-7, Storrs Hall, RM 28, Storrs, CT 06269-2007.

Intertel Foundation, Inc.—1991 Hollingworth Award Competition

This $2000 award is presented annually for proposed research in the field of the education or psychology of gifted children and youth, and is open to individuals as well as educational organizations. Deadline for submission of proposals is January 15, 1991. Application information may be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: Dr. Roxanne H. Cramer, Chairman, Hollingworth Award Committee, 4300 Sideburn Rd., Fairfax, VA 22030.

NEXT ISSUE

FOCUS:

GIFTED CHILDREN WITH VISION PROBLEMS

THE GIFT OF VISION
Dr. Lynn Hellerstein

VISUAL DISABILITIES AND THE GIFTED
Dr. Roger T. Dowis

The world ... is only beginning to see that the wealth of a nation consists more than anything else in the number of superior individuals it harbors...

— William James —

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July - August, 1990

Volume 2, Issue 6

The Gift of Vision

Lynn Fishman Hellerstein, O.D.

What are the most common symptoms and complaints of visual problems? Typical symptoms and complaints include:

Blurriness

Double vision

Fatigue
(especially with sustained near work)

Loss of place with reading

Rubbing and/or closing an eye

Omitting letters or words

Needing a finger or marker

Difficulty with writing
(sizing, spacing, copying)

Difficulty with spelling
(often spells more phonetically)

Poor gross and/or fine motor coordination.

This list contains just some of the more obvious symptoms. A more complete list can be obtained from the Optometric Extension Program (1985). Many gifted children only exhibit some of the symptoms but not all. These children often have strengths in creative thinking, verbalization, and high abstract reasoning. On IQ testing, there is often a significant disparity, where the Performance section is much lower than the Verbal section, *(continued on page 8)*

FOCUS ON:

GIFTED CHILDREN WITH LEARNING PROBLEMS

SPECIAL FEATURE:

Reasoning about Giftedness:
A Response
N. E. Jackson, Ph.D. 7

INSIDE

The Hidden Gifted Learner
Suzanne Perry..... 3

Parenting the Gifted
Elizabeth Meckstroth..... 4

Instructional Strategies
Joyce VanTassel-Baska.. 5

The Reading Room
Stephanie Tolan 6

The Highly Gifted
Kathi Kearney.....14

Adolescent Passages
Thomas Buescher 15

Personality Plus
Linda Silverman 16

Creative Ventures and Encounters
Jerry Flack 17

Current Developments in Gifted Education
Dorothy Knopper.....18

From Parent to Parent
Lisa Ferguson 19

Tutoring Techniques for the Gifted

Jeffrey N. Freed, M.A.T.

Many people believe that gifted children achieve easily in school; yet, there are large numbers of such children who experience difficulty with schoolwork. Most of my tutoring practice consists of gifted and highly gifted students who are underachieving in school. In working with this group, I've noticed many interesting commonalities that I would like to share in this article.

Perfectionism

One of the most striking characteristics I have observed in the gifted students I tutor is their **perfectionism**. It seems that the intensity of their perfectionism increases in direct proportion to their intelligence: the brighter the child, the more perfectionistic. This personality trait has been noted in research on underachieving gifted students (Whitmore, 1980).

It is commonly assumed by mental health professionals that perfectionism in gifted children is a function of parental pressure. However, my experience does not support this. I've tutored over 100 gifted students in the past 3 *(continued on page 11)*

FROM THE EDITOR

Happy Summer! This issue focuses on gifted children with learning disabilities. In the past 11 years in assessing children at the Gifted Child Development Center, we have found learning disabilities to be surprisingly common among the gifted. About one-sixth of the children who come for testing have discrepancies between their strengths and weaknesses sufficient to be considered learning disabilities. But there is some controversy over whether these weaknesses should be considered "disabilities," since, in most cases the weaknesses are **not below average**.

The psychometric literature cautions against labeling a child as learning disabled if none of his or her scores falls significantly below the norms for average students. Federal and state laws often prohibit the provision of services to students who are not performing 2 years below grade level. And since gifted programs are achievement oriented, educators often have difficulty understanding how a child can be "gifted" while only receiving average grades and average scores on achievement tests.

This situation represents a solid block against the recognition of dual exceptionalities in one individual. A child who obtains astronomically high scores in Vocabulary, Similarities, Comprehension and Block Design on the WISC-R is unquestionably a gifted child, because these subtests are the most highly loaded on abstract reasoning ability – the sine qua non of giftedness. If other scores are much lower, and pull the child's Full Scale score down below the gifted range, the child is still gifted, with possible learning disabilities. Coding, for example, is a measurement of eye-hand coordination, not related at all to abstract reasoning ability, and yet, this is included in calculating a child's IQ. We have seen discrepancies of **3 or 4 standard deviations** between Similarities and Coding scores, sufficient to disqualify a child from a gifted program.

Children with large discrepancies in their profiles are at most risk for being overlooked for selection into gifted programs, and, much worse, for being removed from gifted programs on the basis of subsequent testing, even if they have been functioning successfully in the program. This is an unconscionable misuse of assessment information, and discriminates against children with hidden handicaps.

If a one standard deviation discrepancy between Verbal and Performance scores is sufficient to be considered a learning disability for students in the average range, the same standards should be applied to children in the gifted range, **regardless of whether they are above or below the norm**. In assessing gifted children, intra-individual differences are more important than comparisons with normative samples. Until we understand this, we will continue to overlook gifted children with hidden disabilities, and this population will remain unserved.

Linda Silverman

Understanding Our Gifted

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Suzanne M. Perry

THE HIDDEN GIFTED LEARNER

Ms. Westbrook's red marking pen dropped from her hand unnoticed as she sighed and gazed out the window. She was recalling the lively class conversation that had preceded the writing assignment that she was now grading. She could picture Tom, black hair tousled, green eyes blazing as he passionately defended Shylock's decision. She could tell from reading the papers that his eloquent oratory influenced quite a few other classmates. Then she came to Tom's own paper with the date at the top of his paper that read "Oct. 82, 1998." She scanned the page and tried to find some meaning within the repeated reversals, incomplete erasures and sentences that began but never finished. She supposed she should be happy that this paper had at least been turned in. She sighed again. What to do about Tom . . . to help him, challenge him, channel him, remediate him. . . heck, how should she even grade him? She felt frustrated and perplexed. At the same time, at home, Tom was experiencing similar emotions. How could he be so bright and so incompetent at the same time?

What's Wrong?

The learning disabled gifted student, most often characterized by a bewildering combination of striking strengths and marked weaknesses, presents a double challenge to teachers, parents and unquestionably, to self. There is often a school/home dichotomy in which the child may have little success at school and yet at home be tremendously capable in a variety of hobbies or other pursuits. The student may have learned to compensate adequately enough for her memory and perceptual deficits to actually function within the normal range. However, compensation skills may not be reflected on an IQ test, so the child's giftedness is often overlooked when standard measures are applied. If special programming is provided for this student it is more than likely of a remedial nature. This repeated focus on weaknesses alone can result in a loss of interest in school, negative self concept and even depression or thoughts of suicide.

What Can Be Done To Help?

Whether provided within a gifted setting or as an extension of the regular classroom, opportunities need to be provided for the gifted learning disabled child to work from *strengths* rather than solely on weaknesses. This will free the individual from being chained at school to his lowest level of functioning. Activities will frequently highlight *abstract and creative thinking* (often areas of strength for learning disabled children) and will be designed to circumvent weaknesses. This may mean taking tape recorded notes instead of written ones, receiving instruction in alternative study techniques such as *creating mental pictures of information* and the use of recorded texts and extensive audio visual aids. The opportunity to investigate a real problem and to present results to others in a program that includes products created from the child's strengths will help build the student's self concept as well as help fine tune the skills the child will need to be successful in life.

A Parent's Perspective

While there is much that can be done, the path is not without its pitfalls or unmarked detours. In conclusion, a poem written by the parent of a learning disabled gifted child:

ONE EAGLE by Earon S. Davis

Trapped by disparities, but not by despair.
Awkward at walking, yet able to fly.
Guide me and teach me to walk like the others.
But nurture my strength, as my wings need to soar.
Shelter me from turmoil, so I can see beauty.
Protect me from my fears, so I can feel safe.
Answer my questions, no matter how odd.
Your listening and answers are beacons in the void.
Impatient so often, I can become frantic.
As I constantly search for clues to my path.
When it's quiet and calm, I can return your humanity.
But during a storm, my needs cannot wait.
I'm different, I know, and I do have some problems.
I feel badly at the pain I have seen in your face.
But if you can still help me, I'll be honest and open.
Though the journey is difficult, we can find the way.

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PARENTING

Empathy

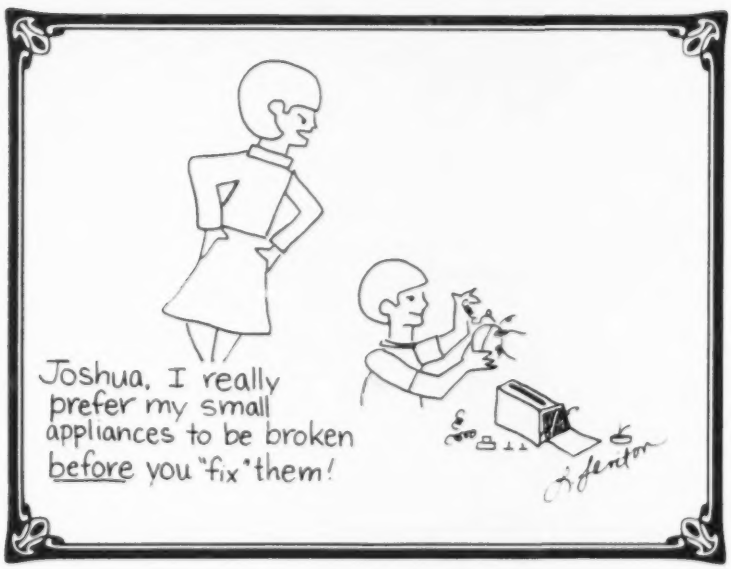
Maybe my most poignant glimpse in life was sensing the agony of a young man who annulled his mother's mothering with, "You never loved me." Mom sobbed, "I've always loved you; I've loved you since the day you were born." How can there be such contrast between intent and reception?

One young mother wondered, "I spent my whole growing up with my parents taking the wind out of my sails. What can I do so that my daughter won't feel that way about me when she's grown?"

What can we do to assure that our children will not grow up and be glad that they live far away from us? Here are some clues from literature in other fields.

Researchers found that when students feel that their teachers have high empathy for them there are some significant effects. Academic achievement, positive self-concept, and attendance go up – so do positive peer relationships in the classroom. Students also commit less vandalism and have fewer disciplinary problems. And there is a significant relationship between perceived teacher empathy and the student's value of that teacher's competence (Goldstein & Michaels, 1985).

From another realm, studies of medical care indicate that the single most important factor in patients' perceptions of care quality is how patients experience the staff's understanding of their own view of their illness and treatment (Press & Ganey, 1990).



These studies have powerful implications for parents. Empathy is not just a nice idea; it is a real force. How can we express empathy so that it is experienced by our children?

- Listen with compassion to your child's experiences;
- Reflect the content of what your child is telling you. Say back the essence of what you heard.
- Express what your child is **feeling.** Your child will tell you if you're wrong. You might hear, "I'm not angry, just frustrated."
- Notice your body language; show your openness in your body posture.
- Touch your child.

*(See **Understanding Our Gifted**, Vol. I, Issue 1 for additional suggestions.)*

In each encounter, we have the power to give Life or Death to our child's ideas, feelings, Self value.

"Man wishes to be confirmed in his being by man, and wishes to have a presence in the being of the other. . . secretly and bashfully he watches for a Yes which allows him to be and which can come only from one human person to another."
(Buber, 1965, p. 71)

Yes.

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Elizabeth Meckstroth is a therapist and consultant in Evanston, Illinois and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child*.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Joyce VanTassel-Baska

It has often struck me that gifted educators are very good at making lists of provision, principles, skills and product types. Yet, as a field we are much less proficient at integrating these lists into meaningful instructional process. Part of the problem lies in not attending to the necessary preconditions and actual conditions of delivering a differentiated curriculum to gifted learners. Instructional processes serve the important function of mediating the content objectives of any lesson and the receptivity level of students to that objective, and, thus, are critical to the enterprise of teaching and learning.

It might be argued that for gifted learners the mode of instruction is less critical, given their ability to connect with content and usually master it quickly and well. Yet, even the gifted need high quality instruction to maximize the level of their knowledge acquisition and minimize both the time and energy needed to focus on lower level work. If a teacher cannot facilitate the knowledge acquisition process effectively for individual learners, then the best curriculum plan will go awry.

But how does one go about such facilitation? Is it dependent on learned skills in areas such as discovery learning or inquiry or in asking the right level questions or in using teaching paradigms such as creative problem-solving? Earlier columns might suggest that these are the important processes to focus on. However, I have become more and more convinced that merely manipulating process is insufficient to mediate curriculum for the gifted. We must also attend to manipulation of content in fundamental ways.

To illustrate, let me pose alternative examples of an activity for gifted learners that represent a continuum from "less appropriate" to "more appropriate."

- Discuss plot, setting and characters in the short story, "A Rose for Emily".
- Compare and contrast the plot, setting, characters, motivation, theme, and climax of "A Rose for Emily" and "The Bear."

This pair of activities, geared for use at the secondary level, represents important distinctions. The more appropriate activity engages learners in critical analysis as the foundational element of their manipulation of knowledge. Moreover, it seeks to have them use two stimuli to do so. Another distinction lies in the more complex and abstract task of handling theme and character motivation in addition to the basic elements of plot, character, and setting. Story form is also considered, as well as climax. If we agree that the second activity is more appropriate for gifted learners, what instructional mediation would enhance its use? The options come immediately to mind. We could:

Hold a discussion in which students demonstrate their capacity to do the activity in oral form.

Have students develop an expository essay in class and conference with them individually or in small groups regarding their analysis.

Lecture on key elements of short stories and use the activity as a seatwork application of information for quizzing students on their understanding.

Develop panel discussion groups that allow students to discuss and present as a group their critical analysis of the two stories.

Engage students in "creating a representational visual product" that conveys their analysis of the stories – videotape, mobile, slides, collage, etc.

Assign the activity as homework – a direct follow-up to a class lecture and discussion on short story elements.

In my next column, I will discuss how to select among these options.

Joyce VanTassel-Baska, Ed.D., is Jody and Layton Smith Professor of Education at William and Mary College, in Williamsburg, Virginia. She edited the book, *Comprehensive Curriculum for Gifted Learners.*

Stephanie S. Tolan

THE READING ROOM

Welcome to the second installment of Reading Room's first mini-series on books which focus on the emotional sensitivity of gifted children. This time we will discuss one work of fiction, and one of biography. The first, Zibby O'Neal's *The Language of Goldfish*, is a moving story of 13-year-old Carrie's difficulty leaving the world of childhood. Carrie is an artist and, like so many other gifted children, especially observant and deeply introspective. She takes her life, her thoughts, her feelings and her relationships very, very seriously.

A middle child, Carrie has always been close to her older sister, Moira. But Moira is joyfully and easily making the transition into teen life, leaving her behind. Carrie tries desperately to cling to childhood, symbolized by the magical goldfish language the two created when they were very young. Her own changing body and her growing awareness of the place of sexuality in human life terrify her, until in a dreamlike break with her rational self, she attempts to take her life.

The book chronicles her careful steps, through therapy, her art and her own growing, across the bridge between childhood and young adulthood. It is easy to forget that gifted children can fall behind at critical transition periods for the very reasons that made them seem especially mature in their early years – their intense personal awareness. Their need to understand and control their lives can make adolescence an excruciating limbo, where the familiar must be discarded and control seems forever lost. Adults readily forget that childhood itself is among the first of our "necessary losses." This is an important book – though few gifted children may attempt suicide, Carrie's story can help them share a sense of change and loss that they may be reluctant to express on their own.

The second book is *The Short Life of Sophie Scholl*, by Hermann Vinke, a biography in reminiscences, photos, letters, diaries and drawings of the German girl who was executed by the Nazis in 1943 for her participation in the non-violent resistance group, The White Rose. The group, formed by her brother Hans, was made up of university students who used words – ideas – against Hitler within Germany, distributing anti-Nazi leaflets. Before it was discovered and broken up The White Rose briefly gave a voice (and hope) to many Germans who were trapped in their own government's machinery of death.

This book provides an almost textbook exploration of the moral development the gifted child in a family where freedom and intellectual exploration are central.

Sophie briefly participated in the Hitler Youth, to which she was drawn by idealism and her love of Germany. Though her father argued strongly against Hitler and everything he stood for, he allowed all his children to make their own choices. Those choices soon took them far from the rabid patriotism and racial bigotry of Hitler Youth and into the world of thought – often the thought of "forbidden" philosophers.

Sophie was an artist and writer. She loved life and nature, art and ideas. Having built her ideals from these resources she chose to give her life for them.

The Polish psychologist Dabrowski has suggested that the unusual emotional sensitivity of the gifted leads to transcendent moral development and the ability to engage in heroic acts. This book offers clear and concrete support to that belief. Sophie's short life was intense, a celebration of body and mind and spirit. In a world where comfort and security are often touted to our brightest children, this is a book that could change minds and perhaps lives.

Stephanie Tolan, from Waterford, New York, is a noted author of children's books and one of the authors of the award-winning book, *Guiding the Gifted Child.*

Reasoning About Indicators of Giftedness:
A Response

Nancy Ewald Jackson, Ph.D.

Two articles in the May-June, 1990 issue of *Understanding Our Gifted*, one by Gross and Feldhusen and another by Parkinson, presented vivid and accurate pictures of the characteristics, typical experiences, and educational needs of gifted young children. However, these articles also perpetuated some misunderstandings that already were widespread in the field of gifted education. The authors of both articles interpreted *characteristics* of gifted children as *indicators* of giftedness. From my perspective, there are important distinctions between these two concepts.

Gross and Feldhusen have noted correctly that the majority of children in the extremely high-IQ group, which these authors have defined as exceptionally gifted, begin reading during their preschool years. Precocious reading is a common characteristic of children with exceptionally high IQs. They go on to claim that the early development of reading is "one of the most powerful indications of exceptional giftedness: (p. 7). As I have pointed out in this newsletter (Jackson, 1988), there is no empirical base for this claim.

How can a characteristic that occurs in most exceptionally gifted children not be a strong indicator of exceptional giftedness? This can happen if the characteristic also occurs in many children who are *not* exceptionally gifted. There are precocious readers whose IQs are only modestly above average. Across a number of studies, the mean IQ of children identified as precocious readers has been about 130 (Jackson, Donaldson, & Cleland, 1988). This is a high mean, in the gifted range, but remember that the IQs of about half of the precocious readers studied were below this mean – that is, below a level that would qualify them as even moderately gifted in intelligence. Children with advanced reading skills and IQs of 115 or 120 are exceptionally gifted as readers, but they do not qualify as exceptionally gifted by the IQ-based definition that Gross and Feldhusen are using.

An indicator must differentiate between groups by occurring more frequently, or at different levels, in one group than another. To know whether a characteristic is an indicator of giftedness, one must explicitly define the kind of giftedness that is of interest and then determine the characteristic's frequency of occurrence among both gifted and nongifted populations.

Characteristics and indicators both provide potentially useful information, but different kinds of information. People who work with gifted children need to know which characteristics are common within the group. For example, knowing that most children with exceptionally high IQs begin reading early is helpful in planning primary school curriculum for high-IQ children. Similarly, planning for precocious readers is facilitated by knowing that a characteristic of this population is that they vary greatly in IQ. The characteristics of precocious readers are not the same as the characteristics of children with exceptionally high IQs. Conclusions about reading precocity as a characteristic of high-IQ children may be different from conclusions about high IQ as a characteristic of precocious readers.

An indicator provides relative information about the different distributions of a characteristic in two or more populations. Unlike characteristics, indicators provide useful predictive or diagnostic information. The potential danger inherent in treating characteristics as indicators can be illustrated by considering the list of characteristics of giftedness presented in Parkinson's article from the May-June issue (p. 11). Her checklist is similar to many that appear in textbooks on gifted education. It includes items such as "Is curious, investigative, asks penetrating questions (81%)." Parkinson has reported the percentage of her gifted population that displayed each of the characteristics she lists. Apparently because those percentages are high, she goes on to "recommend that parents use the checklist to evaluate their own children. If a child fits 3/4 of the characteristics, contact a professional for advice and assessment... ." (p. 13). Like Gross and Feldhusen, Parkinson is treating a characteristic as a predictive indicator. The characteristics she lists may also be useful indicators of giftedness, but the only way to tell would be to determine their relative frequency of occurrence in nongifted and gifted children. If few parents of nongifted children report that their child "is curious, investigative, and asks penetrating questions," then this characteristic common among gifted young children also would be an indicator of giftedness.

Treating characteristics as indicators may generate unrealistic expectations. For example, the parent of a precocious reader may be led to expect, on the basis of that characteristic alone, that her child will score exceptionally high on an IQ test or develop in the ways Gross and Feldhusen describe as typical of those exceptionally gifted in intelligence. *(continued on page 8)*

The tendency to make logical errors in dealing with relationships such as those I have discussed seems to be widespread. If we accept that "most residents of nursing homes are elderly," we are prone to conclude that "must elderly people live in nursing homes," neglecting the possibility that many of the elderly live in their own homes. Reasoning problems such as these are called class inclusion syllogisms, and they have been studied extensively by psychologists interested in human cognition and decision making. People do seem to reason better if the syllogisms are presented in the context of familiar problems (Bourne, Dominowski, Loftus, & Healy, 1986).

One reason the treatment of characteristics as indicators has persisted so long in the literature on giftedness may be that we reason from the perspective of our professional experience with gifted groups. Even our research often consists of studies of gifted populations only, without the comparison groups that would enable us to distinguish characteristics from indicators. The challenges of identifying gifted children and developing empirically justified differentiated education require that we broaden our perspective and tidy up our reasoning.

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typically indicating some type of visual perceptual motor problem. To demonstrate the types of visual problems found in this population, three students, **Geoff, Mark, and Lisa**, are presented to show the different types of visual difficulties and how each child compensated.

GEOFF

Geoff was three years old when his mother brought him in for an evaluation because she saw his eyes cross occasionally. He was quite verbal, very "active," distracting, and often showed frustration. He was already reading and played the piano exceptionally well. Vision evaluation revealed a significant amount of hyperopia (farsightedness), amblyopia (lazy eye), and esotropia (crossed eyes). So here we have a top performer despite significant visual problems. Treatment included glasses full time to compensate for the farsightedness, part-time patching (only two hours per day) for the lazy eye and vision therapy to help teach Geoff how to use his two eyes together more efficiently. Vision therapy was quite successful in that Geoff's vision in the "lazy eye" improved dramatically. In addition, his eyes were motorically aligned (straight, not crossed), but there was also improvement in sensory fusion (use of the two eyes together).

Geoff's parents and my staff observed behavioral changes throughout therapy, as Geoff became less distractible and much calmer. Even at the young age of three years old, the frustration and tension were there.

MARK

Mark was twelve years old, attending a school for the gifted, when he was referred to this office by his teacher. He was significantly below age level in reading, spelling and writing. He complained of blurriness, intermittent double vision, words "moving " on the page and fatigue with near work. Vision testing revealed a significant accommodative (focusing) and binocular (eye teaming) problem as well as deficiencies in visual motor integration, visual memory for symbols, and auditory discrimination. Previous psychological testing on the WISC indicated a Verbal IQ of 155 with the Performance IQ 30 points lower - a significant spread! Vision therapy was initiated to improve the deficient areas as well as to emphasize visualization strategies. After a year of treatment, Mark showed tremendous improvement in all visual areas. Focus flexibility, sustenance, eye teaming skills, and visual perceptual motor performance had all improved. He was no longer symptomatic. He made great strides in his academics. Self esteem had greatly been enhanced as he now knew he could perform and be successful.

LISA

Lisa was nine years old when she was referred by her teacher. She had no visual symptoms and was an excellent reader. Her main difficulty was handwriting. She had wonderful ideas for stories but would do anything to avoid paper/pencil tasks. She would dictate her stories to her mother to type, but showed much frustration if asked to write herself. Her writing was slow and laborious. Sizing and spacing of letters were variable. Vision testing revealed adequate visual skills and perceptual abilities. The only area of concern was in visual motor integration (copying shapes and forms). She scored only six months below age level, but all of her other testing was significantly above age level. The "gap" in her performance, compared to her potential, was more of a concern than the actual test score. A short term vision therapy program was initiated to improve visual motor integration and fluency. Visualization strategies were emphasized. *(Continued on page 9)*

At the end of four months, Lisa's handwriting had improved, but most important, she was much less frustrated by paper/pencil tasks. Eventually, a computer for word processing will still be more efficient for her as "her mind still thinks faster than her hand writes"; however, she has developed strategies to compensate for the discrepancy and now will attempt the tasks.

All three gifted youngsters demonstrated different types of visual processing problems, different compensatory abilities and different therapeutic solutions. However, all three benefited from glasses or vision therapy. Vision therapy is not a program just for children, as many adults can and do benefit from it. Although this article speaks to the child's needs, these difficulties, which usually start in childhood, may plague a person through his or her adult life.

Learning problems are often masked in gifted children; many compensate or avoid certain tasks, thereby often showing the profile of an "average" student. Whether the child is labelled as having a learning disability often depends on the tester's ability to observe the frustration or compensatory actions. Of more concern than the actual label is whether or not there are significant gaps in abilities which could reduce overall performance. Learning disabled gifted children can be so frustrated that they will not attempt to do the schoolwork, or they can be straight A students who have to work extremely hard to get the grade. Self-esteem is often compromised when children struggle, thereby complicating the emotional and behavioral picture. Children who are not performing to their potential should be thoroughly evaluated to determine their strengths and weaknesses. This testing should include a psychological-educational battery as well as an auditory and vision evaluation. Dr. Mary Meeker, Director of the SOI Institute in California writes, "There are many reasons why gifted children do not or will not perform adequately, but poor vision function tops the list. There are a multitude of youngsters whose giftedness will go unnoticed, remain undeveloped or be suppressed because of undetected visual problems" (1985, p.17).

An estimated 75% of all classroom learning comes to the student via the visual pathways (Heinke & Greenburg, 1981). Vision is our dominant learning sense. Any interference in these pathways can cause difficulty with learning. Most children are born with healthy eyes and brain. However, vision is a learned process, and something more than 20/20 visual acuity. Visual performance is dependent on the relationships between visual movement skills and body movement skills. The process of vision is not the only means of receiving information, yet it happens to be the dominant sensory system in learning. A properly functioning visual system allows an individual to quickly and accurately localize and identify objects that move in space and to project touching, smelling, and feeling beyond the limit of the body. Vision affects and is affected by posture and balance. If there are disturbances structurally, functionally, or perceptually in vision or motor areas, these disturbances may be reflected in the ability of the person to perform in areas of higher level academics and sports. Even with 20/20 acuity, overall comfort and efficiency may be compromised. Vision disorders may not be the only cause of problems, but may be factors and, thus, needs to be thoroughly investigated by a professional, since many of these children pass the school screenings or other cursory eye examinations.

On IQ testing, there is often a significant disparity, where the Performance section is much lower than the Verbal section, typically indicating some type of visual perceptual motor problem.

IDENTIFICATION

How are these children identified? Observations by teachers and parents are always among the most reliable methods. Most school systems offer visual screenings; however, they are frequently inadequate. The screening usually consists of the Snellen 20/20 chart, which still might pick up a child with a lazy eye or nearsightedness. However, this test is given at 20 feet. How much learning takes place at 20 feet? Very little. A child could actually see double and still pass the screening!

Behavioral optometrists have recommended that the following areas be evaluated in an adequate vision evaluation.

1) Eye health. Inspection of the exterior of the child's eyes and surrounding areas, as well as interior inspection for detection of eye or systemic diseases, is always necessary.

2) Refractive status. The evaluation can determine if nearsightedness, farsightedness, or astigmatism prescriptions may need to be given to help the child see clearly and more efficiently.

3) Ocular motilities (eye movement skills). Following an object as well as being able to fixate accurately and quickly is essential in reading, copying, or ball sports. If eye movements are uncoordinated, this could cause the child to lose his or her place, skip words, miss the ball, etc.

4) Binocularity (eye teaming skills). Judgments of spatial orientation, relationships, depth perception, and accuracy of clear, single vision depend on the accuracy of pointing and focusing the two eyes together. Included is in-depth testing into the accommodative (focusing) system for sustenance and flexibility. Eye teaming *(Continued on page 10)*

and focus problems create fatigue, discomfort, blurriness, inconsistency or avoidance of tasks.

5) Eye-hand coordination skills. Skill in eye-hand coordination is essential to the accurate production of written language as well as efficient and successful sports performance. If significant fine or gross motor problems are detected, then an occupational therapy consult is often requested to perform a more in-depth sensory-motor analysis.

6) Visual perceptual abilities. Being able to recognize differences and similarities between letters and words is essential for learning. Object size, shape, texture, and location need to be immediately and accurately discriminated so that comprehension can be followed by appropriate actions. Included in perceptual abilities is the child's strength in utilizing visualization (visual imagery), which is important in reading comprehension, spelling and other academics and sports.

A behavioral vision evaluation will reveal the necessity for glasses for compensation, prevention, or stress relief. In addition, vision therapy options would also be discussed. Vision therapy is the art and science of developing visual abilities to achieve optimal visual performance and comfort. It is a program of arranged conditions to permit a patient the opportunity to prevent the development of some vision problems (such as nearsightedness), help remediate existing vision problems (eye teaming problems), or enhance the efficiency and comfort of visual functioning (e.g., sports vision helps enhance ones' eye hand coordination, concentration, visualization, etc.).

HELPFUL STRATEGIES

What can teachers and parents do to help gifted children with visual disorders?

- Understanding the gap in performance the physical difficulties as well as emotional overlays, can frequently help the child reduce some of the stress surrounding the problem.
- Allowing the child to do more oral work and less written, busy work can also be beneficial.
- The computer has been a real blessing for many of these children. Even when they struggle with the keyboard, they know the end result always looks better, and that editing is not nearly such a chore, as mistakes do not mean a total rewriting of the paper.
- Visualization strategies are powerful – especially for spelling, reading comprehension, creative writing, relaxation, and preparation for sports or tests. In spelling, teaching the child to "see" the words in his or her head often helps break the "phonetic, creative" spelling pattern. With writing, give instructions such as: "Write easy," "Pretend your arm is a paint brush and paint from your shoulder," "Create a scene in your mind, full of detail, color, warmth, space, movement, etc., then write from your picture." If children get stuck on a word or lose their thought, gently remind them to look up and "see" what's up there. Remember, many of these children are already good visualizers; they just don't always realize when they can use the strategies.
- Most importantly, a referral for good vision care is necessary when symptoms and frustrations persist.

VISION CARE SPECIALISTS

To find a behavioral optometrist, write to the College of Optometry in Vision Development, P.O. Box 285, Chula Vista, CA 92012. Further information regarding vision, types of problems, efficacy of vision therapy, and the names and locations of behavioral optometrists can also be obtained from the Optometric Extension Program, 2912 S. Daimler St., Santa Ana, CA 92705 or the American Optometric Association, 243 N. Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141. When making an appointment, in order to insure an adequate visual evaluation is done, the parent should ask the following questions:

1) Do you give a full series of near point visual tests?

2) Do you give academically related visual perception tests?

3) Do you provide vision therapy in your office? If not, do you refer to a doctor who does?

4) Will you send a written report that all adults concerned can understand and apply to assist this child?

Parents and professionals need to recognize how a child can be so bright and have such gifts in some areas, but still suffer from learning difficulties which can hinder classroom performance as well as affect emotions and behavior. Encouragement, praise, nurturing, and special help enable the to child be happy, successful, and gain confidence in reaching his or her potential. William C. Lee, O.D. (1989) writes of the gift of vision:

In **LIGHT** *there is* **SIGHT**

In **SIGHT** *there is* **VISION**

In **VISION** *there is* **SUCCESS**

In SUCCESS there is HAPPINESS

The gift of vision is one gift all children deserve.

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years, as well as numerous nongifted students. I work in children's homes, which gives me the opportunity to directly observe parenting styles. The parents of gifted children vary enormously in terms of setting high expectations for their children, but the trait appears almost without exception in their children – particularly if they are highly gifted. Parental pressure is sometimes there, overtly or subtly, and pressure can make these children much more rigid and perfectionistic. However, I've also observed incredibly perfectionistic behavior on the part of children whose parents are very easy going. Further, I have not observed this trait very often in the nongifted children I have tutored.

Recently, I've been working with three highly gifted 3-5 year olds, and I have been astonished at how early their perfectionism manifested itself – especially when no apparent pressure had been placed upon them by their parents. This leads me to believe that perfectionism is an *internal* characteristic in this population. I now expect to see this trait in gifted students, and I have designed some strategies for coping with it.

James, a gifted 4 year old, had expressed a strong desire to read, so his parents asked me to assist him in bringing his desire to fruition. When I began working with James, I discovered that he was completely unwilling to take any risks. One strategy I employed was reading passages to him first before asking him to read. In this way, he could access his extraordinary memory to help him decipher words. Then I told him it was fine to make mistakes; in fact, I encouraged him to make mistakes on purpose to see if he could slip them by me. He immediately got into the game. I caught most of the errors, and would make comments such as, "Oh, you caught me! It was 'We' not 'to,' wasn't it? Very good, James. Boy, are you quick!"

Interestingly enough, he **knew** that I knew that he didn't know the word, but that was OK, as long as he didn't have to admit "publicly" that he didn't know the word. In essence, I devised a way to teach James the subject matter is a non-ego-threatening way, and it worked. With another child who mumbled words he didn't know as he read aloud, I would fill in the word for him in a face-saving manner; e.g., "You just said 'purpose,' right?"

Many highly gifted children are not risk-takers (Silverman, 1988). They prefer to watch, gather information, and then demonstrate their proficiency all at once in a given area (Keirsey & Bates, 1978). They don't learn in stages; they observe until they've mastered something – even walking. Introverted gifted children are slow to warm up, and don't take praise well. They consider praise pressure. In order to successfully instruct them, one must tailor the strategies to these children's natural learning style. The next case illustrates this point.

Al was another 4 year old with an estimated IQ of 170. He would ask me to read the same book to him over and over, exclaiming how much he loved it. One day, just as I was getting ready to leave, he opened the book and read it from cover to cover perfectly, to his astonished mother's delight. Al would not attempt to read *any* part of the book until he had mastered the entire book and could read it perfectly. Although we never discussed it, he knew that I understood his need for perfection. I just allowed him to lead the learning process and proceed at his own pace and in his own way.

It is my belief that perfectionism is a constant in gifted children that must be dealt with in some fashion throughout their lives. But it can be managed and utilized in a school or home environment in which it is recognized for what it is, and understood. The most difficult job I have is trying to convince teachers and psychologists that this trait should be accepted, not fixed, and that no one is to blame for it.

HEIGHTENED SENSES

In addition to their perfectionism, I have noted that children with IQ's above 140 seem to have heightened sensory awareness. They taste more acutely, smell everything, observe more in their environment. They get so much information that they have trouble filtering it out. They are constantly bombarded by stimuli. They are also incredibly sensitive and intuitive. These observations fit with Dabrowski's "overexcitabilities" (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977).

Their heightened sensitivity makes them react intensely to everything. Anyone who has spent any time with highly gifted children realizes that there is no such thing as "constructive criticism." Indeed, if you make 10 positive comments and one slightly negative one, it is the negative one that is remembered, stewed over, and is often the cause of a later unexplained outburst or a session of tears.

Perhaps their extreme sensitivity to criticism is a heightened reaction to the very subtle pressures and unvoiced hopes we all hold for our children. This may be true, but we have many other subtle feelings and attitudes toward our children, so why is it that these are the ones most readily and universally perceived by highly gifted children? In working with gifted students, it is imperative to remember their sensitivity and to protect their egos. Subtle negative messages can render ineffective even the most well thought through teaching techniques.

VISUAL-SPATIAL LEARNERS

Many of the students with whom I work would be classified at "visual-spatial learners" (Silverman, 1989). They learn in a global manner and tend to be poor with details. They need to know why they are going where they're going. A sequential learner seems to thrive on rote sequential *(Continued on page 12)*

learning – repeating concepts over and over again. But drill is death to the visual-spatial learner. In a rote learning environment, these kids are miserable and frustrated. They don't learn step-by-step, and sometimes can't show their work because they arrive at conclusions intuitively. Visual-spatial learners need to be able to visualize the whole before they can learn the parts.

I didn't know anything about visual-spatial learners when I began my tutoring practice, but I discovered almost accidentally that I could teach certain children the concepts better if I reversed their order. If I started at the end and worked backwards, I was more successful. They can learn very difficult concepts easily, but they have difficulty with the most basic ones.

The best technique I have found for teaching visual-spatial learners is visualization. I have tried to include visualization in my curriculum whenever possible, as I have noted that most of these children are wonderful visualizers. Visualization can also be used as a tool to reduce tension. As a method of stress reduction, I have students do deep breathing and then visualize a peaceful scene. I ask them to involve all of their senses in their imagery: imagine what it looks like, sounds like, feels like, smells like, tastes like. If someone does this exercise for 15 or 20 days in a row, he or she can usually access that image at will during stressful periods, and re-experience the same sense of calm.

TEACHING MATHEMATICS

In working with gifted visual-spatial children, I have observed how poorly they tend to do with times tables, subtraction, and many forms of simple rote math. They do better with geometry and physics when they are in high school. However, telling these children that "math will catch up with them," and that soon they will excel at it, holds little value when the student is constantly exposed to timed math tests and reward systems based on who can come up with the fastest answers in class.

Although visual-spatial learners are natural visualizers, they usually don't apply this skill to computational math. They often become frightened and defensive regarding computation, and this fear prevents them from using their greatest asset – the power to visualize. I do a lot of mental computation with my students to increase their reliance of visual imagery rather than rote solutions which are hard for them to remember. By doing the math mentally, by seeing the problems utilizing upper eye movements, the students have a much lower probability of being tense; it is very hard to be tense while visualizing.

Indeed, if you make 10 positive comments and one slightly negative one, it is the negative one that is remembered...

Also, visual-spatial learners seem to be able to hold an image longer than rote learners. By teaching them certain key endings to problems, and then having them work the problems mentally, they can get very fast at these calculations and can turn a former weakness into a strength. For example, they can multiply 24 x 13 by calculating 24 x 10, arriving at 240, holding the image, then calculating 3 x 24, and adding the two together. While rote learners tend to lose the first image, invert it, or mix it with the second, visual-spatial learners have no difficulty retaining these images.

If they are terrified of math, I teach students something really difficult, like squares, number sequences, forward and backward patterns, double digit multiplication, 3 or 4 step algorithms, in which multiplication and division facts are disguised. I teach them subtraction by having them count backwards from 100. Sometimes when they are doing mental computation, I have them nod when they've got the answer rather than having to prove to me that they are right. This is another face-saving device I've developed so that the student can learn without continuously feeling evaluated.

TEACHING READING

Gifted children are better at reading comprehension than at decoding words. If they understand 25% of the words, they can comprehend about 60% of the text. I've also noted that rhythm is helpful in teaching them to read – even if it is artificial. When children miss the little words, it disturbs the natural flow of their reading, and then they get tense. When they get tense, they can't visualize and they need to visualize to learn. Recognizing their need to be perfect, I ask them to do very short assignments perfectly, such as read just one paragraph without making an error. This also focuses their attention on details, a skill in which they need much assistance.

I've noticed that most of the children that I work with have auditory weaknesses, and that they are deficient in phonics skills. I've devised a game where I might print 50 or 60 common words, many of which are similar (e.g., "still, till, chill, might, fright, could, would, should"). Then the student and I compete to see who can identify the word from the list that the other has chosen. An elaborate point system adds to the fun: the fewer the clues, the more points they receive for the answer. For example, if I've picked the word "still" out of the list, I might say, "It has 5 letters, with a consonant blend leading it off, only one vowel, and 3 tall letters." The student must then survey the list applying the criteria appropriately and arrive at a conclusion. Competitive games such as this one appear to be highly motivating. The students learn to *(Continued on page 13)*

apply phonics rules and observe the subtle differences between words, while also using their considerable intuitive skills in order to figure out my patterns. They can often spell 10 words at the end of the game without having been asked to learn to spell. Their analysis of the words for clues heightens their visual recall.

I have tried to include visualization in my curriculum whenever possible, as I have noted that most of these children are wonderful visualizers.

Through this game I have observed how incredibly competitive some of these children are, and I have seen how bruised they feel if they lose. Magnify this tenfold in a school situation, and it would be easy to see why an elaborate defense system might be set up psychologically by these children to protect against the devastating effects of losing at school and appearing foolish.

TEACHING SPELLING

Visualization is particularly useful in the area of spelling. Using bright colors, and writing letters in large print, and then letting the student "look at and take a picture of the word," often works wonders. I have frequently noticed the enthusiasm with which former indifferent spellers have attacked spelling when armed with this approach. An interesting sidelight is that many times these students will insist on visualizing and spelling forwards and backwards words such as "distributorship" and "existentialism," while eschewing smaller words like "secret" or "about." Visualization often leads to dramatic improvement in spelling.

TEACHING WRITING

I tell my students that writing is just like talking except for spelling and punctuation. One of the exercises I use is having the student write me notes and then I write back. Sometimes we compete to see who can write the shortest complete sentence. As with reading, I give my students very short writing assignments that they can complete perfectly. I use humor frequently in the tasks I assign: right-brained humor, puns, plays on words, and ridiculous writing assignments. And I consistently emphasize effort rather than performance.

BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

In playing these and other games with the children that I've worked with, I've often had the realization that one of the things that I was doing was play therapy. In the process of watching a child struggle, try, win and sometimes lose, and have to deal with these feelings, I've observed the growth of their self-confidence, and noticed a commensurate improvement in their ability to handle setbacks in school situations as well.

The surest way to **damage** a child's self-esteem is to accuse him or her of being "lazy." Many, many times I have heard parents proclaim, "My son is lazy. If I don't sit on him, he's never going to do anything." When visiting schools, I often hear teachers say, "This boy is lazy," "He just doesn't care," "He has no discipline." It is my belief that parents and teachers are merely observing the student's defense mechanisms. These students are anything but lazy. They're very driven; they hate to lose. In fact, the child is saying, "I can't excel at this activity, so why try?" To try hard and to fail anyway is devastating, so they protect their egos by not trying. "I won't try; therefore I haven't failed."

Many times these children exhibit body language and poses which suggest sheer boredom and lack of interest. Anyone watching these outward manifestations tends to draw the conclusion that the student doesn't care. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. These students feel trapped and frustrated by both the traditional school curriculum and by their parents' and teachers' attitudes toward them. They often find very creative ways to avoid doing things they don't feel they're good at.

In elementary school, a student's grades are really unimportant. All that matters is how the school experience affects the child's self-esteem. It is self-esteem that motivates the individual to strive to overcome difficulties. Every adult in the child's world can help build that self- esteem – can become part of the cheering team that enables the child to succeed.

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THE HIGHLY GIFTED

Finding Highly Gifted Children (Part III)

Highly Gifted Children in Special Populations

- Joanna, age seven, was dramatic, artistic, extroverted, and had a power for abstract thought far beyond many of her classmates. Yet despite two years in school, she could not read a single word. She was eventually referred for an evaluation through the special education services in her district. The identification of a specific learning disability was no surprise, but use of the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC) also indicated extremely high simultaneous processing abilities.

- David lived in a tiny farming community of 400 people. He was an excellent student, but his first priority was helping his parents and his five brothers and sisters to keep the family farm financially afloat. His entire graduating class consisted of a dozen students; most intended to stay in the same community after graduation. Although he had no plans for college, David took the SATs as a senior, and to his surprise scored 800 in math and 740 on the verbal section. When his uncle encouraged him to apply to an Ivy League school, David's response was that perhaps he would consider attending one year at the state university, 80 miles away – located in a city that David himself had never visited.

- Elizabeth, a kindergartner, has been reading *A Wrinkle in Time* and the *Little House* books at home. But when she goes to school in the morning, she participates quietly and cooperatively in the reading readiness activities of her kindergarten class, never letting on to anyone that she already knows how to read.

- Maria's family spoke a mixture of both Spanish and English at home, with Spanish predominating. And Maria, age six, was a whiz in math. She completed the first and second grade math texts in two and a half months. By Christmas break, she was halfway through the third grade text when she ran into difficulty. Able to decode but not able to understand what English words such as "spent" meant, she could not do the word problems. A frustrated Maria cried and threw the textbook down in disgust; her teacher suggested that perhaps Maria was "not so smart after all" and had simply "plateaued."

Joanna, David, Elizabeth, and Maria are all highly gifted children, yet they represent populations who are at risk of not even being identified as *gifted*. Joanna's handicap, David's rural isolation, Elizabeth's social awareness as a gifted girl, and Maria's bilingualism are factors which compound and complicate the identification process. How can we find and serve the highly gifted among special populations? The following suggestions will help.

1. ***Look* for these children.** It may sound obvious, but unless we look for these children we will not find them. Identification processes in schools should specifically target special populations of students. In addition, informed parents, friends, neighbors, and relatives sometimes perceive patterns of advanced development in these children which are obscured, unintentionally, by the culture of the school. Following up on such observations can lead to the early identification, intervention, and support essential for optimum development.

2. **Use a combination of appropriate assessment instruments and qualitative data for identification.** Selecting appropriate test instruments to identify these children is extremely important. For instance, David and Elizabeth could probably have been identified as highly gifted using an instrument such as the Stanford-Binet *(Form L-M)*. David's rural community, however, had no resources for early testing and identification, and no program options for gifted children. Only a belated discovery of the extent of his talents and the encouragement of his uncle led him to consider college as a possibility at all.

Elizabeth should be tested in early childhood; already she is showing signs of hiding her abilities. Joanna's learning disability made her an unlikely candidate to ever be referred for the gifted program, but the K-ABC uncovered unusual strengths. Maria may need to be individually tested using a Spanish translation of one of the major intelligence tests.

In addition, the use of **qualitative data** such as detailed parent interviews, developmental questionnaires, work samples, and a case study of the child can provide important insights. We are aware of many unique characteristics of highly gifted children. Qualitative data allow us to look for these characteristics and for patterns indicating extraordinarily advanced development, when test scores do not tell the entire story.

3. **Understand the interaction between extraordinary giftedness and the unique experience of being from a special population.** Children who are highly gifted and also culturally different, handicapped, economically disadvantaged, or bilingual are at risk of not being discovered. Also, highly gifted girls may go into hiding, growing up in a society which still gives powerful but subtle messages about its expectations for women. These children must simultaneously deal with the intellectual, social, and emotional issues of extreme intellectual giftedness combined with the additional issues which arise as a result of belonging to a special population. In these cases, especially, the traditional achievement orientation of many public school gifted programs may really not fit. "Achievement" often means something entirely different to the child in such situations than it does to the school, as the child works to integrate two major life influences.

Highly gifted children come from many different backgrounds and life circumstances. Extraordinary intellectual giftedness cannot be nurtured if it is not recognized. It is imperative, therefore, that we find these children, wherever they may be.

Kathi Kearney is Founder of the Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children in Auburn, ME, and is a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Thomas M. Buescher

ADOLESCENT PASSAGES

How Unique Are Talented Adolescents? (Part II)

First Things First: Talent or Development?

In the first part of this series, the uniqueness of adolescence as a life process was set forth as the stage on which all later development is enacted. Each person brings a unique perspective to how adolescence can be understood. Part Two sketches some of the predictable tensions of adolescence.

Life Inside and Out

It might be tempting for parents, teachers, and sometimes even young people themselves to toy with the idea that talent development can provide a safe harbor or a short cut through some of the stormy moments of adolescence. After all, if being articulate, imaginative, or insightful at times during childhood brought compassion and acceptance to talented youngsters, it is reasonable to think those same traits will smooth the adolescent passage. Fortunately for us all, adolescence as a life process cannot be avoided simply because one is exceptionally bright, skillful, or creative. The healthy traits of childhood are important building blocks for the roads that go *through*, not *around*, adolescence. Being talented in any measure should sustain and not impede the journey.

To appreciate the importance of accepting and working through the momentary challenges of adolescence, consider the fact that by age 12 or 13, most young people become consciously aware of the life coursing *inside* themselves and its difference at times from the life *outside* themselves. A difference of inner versus outer consciousness. Sheila, an eighth grader in her middle school's G/T program, complains at times to friends and parents that no one appreciates her *feelings* about their expectations of her. "I'm getting more confused all the time. Just once I'd like my parents to see my side of what it's like to be their 'gifted daughter.' They think schoolwork is the biggest priority for me. It's not!" Yet Sheila anguishes telling them why her own feelings might be important for them to weigh and appreciate. She fears sounding silly or just complaining.

Predictable Tensions

Examples of the discrepancy felt between life inside and outside talented adolescents and their peers are easily spotted at home and school. They indicate the presence of some of the healthy core issues adolescents are working hard to successfully solve; they are not signs of alarming decay of talent or self-esteem. Most of these core issues include gradual movement from earlier, successful temporary positions to more solid and mature adult-life states. They include some of the following transitions: **from dependence to independence and interdependence; from family control or peer control to self-control and self-direction; from the desire for privacy to the willingness to disclose about oneself; from stances of defensiveness to aspects of openness.** Perhaps most centrally, from the biopsychosocial viewpoint, adolescents are moving from a biological state of being 'barren' to the mature level of being 'fertile.' Each of these changes focuses feelings of tension and difference in *every adolescent*, talented or not. Few if any can be avoided for long. All must be successfully resolved for young adulthood to unfold easily.

First Things First

From one perspective, outstanding talent measurably affects a young person's personality, performance, and relationships across the lifespan. Accordingly, exceptional talent seems to create a novel developmental path that less talented youth do not follow towards adulthood. A second perspective, and I do admit it is one I favor a bit more myself, suggests, on the contrary, that the biopsychosocial experience of development is consistent and changeless for every youngster and varies only in deference to individual constitution and heredity. Accordingly, the intensity of adolescence, its issues and its accomplishments, are no differently felt by talented young people. However, the uniqueness of the adolescent passage lies in how it is perceived, analyzed, understood, and *resolved*.

Consequently, the means and nuances of how young people with outstanding ability accept and cope with the demands that talent brings to their lives *as adolescents* is an important focal point for assuring healthy progress to adulthood. Talent does not affect the constitution and personality but rather the means and choices one makes as an adolescent.

Which of these two views more correctly places the proper "first things first" so to speak, talent or development, may not be vital to those of us who live and work with adolescents. What is clear and must be emphasized is that the *experience* of being an adolescent for one who is talented will be fairly unique. The numerous tensions felt at times between 'life inside and life outside' as described by goals, expectations, and desirable relationships are very real. They require abundant empathy and sensitive support from caring adults.

Next issue: Supporting the Unique Adolescent's Experiences

Thomas M. Buescher, Ph.D., M.S.W., is a therapist in Rockland, ME, editor of *Understanding Gifted and Talented Adolescents*, and Research Scholar, Center for Talent Development, Northwestern University.

PERSONALITY PLUS

The "Spacey" Child

"Earth to Harry. Earth to Harry. Do you read me? Is anyone home up there?" How can some children be so mentally absent? Where do they go? Why is it so difficult for them to pay attention?

One of the causes of "spaciness" that we've uncovered at the Gifted Child Development Center is chronic early ear infections. Children who had difficulty tuning in during their first few years of life, due to technical difficulties with their hearing apparatus, become excellent at tuning out. Research on *otitis media* (ear infections) indicates that children who have had **more than 9 ear infections** in the first 3 years (only 3 per year) are at greater risk for inattention in class, and may struggle with phonics, comprehension, and other school tasks (Feagans, 1986).

Some of the children we've seen had 25 or more ear infections. And parents have reported, "Our son only had 1 ear infection: it lasted from 3 months to 3 years." It stands to reason that children who had this much difficulty hearing during the critical period in which they were learning how to learn would not be adept at listening skills. Even when the ear infections are cleared up, and the child's acuity appears to be "normal," the **processing** of auditory stimuli tends to remain weak.

The following symptoms appear more prevalent in children with a significant history of *otitis media*: difficulties with attention, articulation, phonics, spelling, memorization, timed tests, sequencing, reversals, handwriting, and long written assignments (Silverman, 1989). They may ask to have directions repeated. Paradoxically, they may be excellent at very complex tasks, yet struggle with simple ones. For example, they usually excel at math reasoning, but are terrible at computation.

What should you do about the space cadets in your family or classroom? Here are some concrete ideas:

- **Touch** their shoulders to get their attention.
- Get **eye contact** before talking to them.
- Talk **louder** to them during each ear infection, and for several weeks afterward.
- **Limit** the number of **directions** you give at one time.
- **Show** them, don't tell them. For these children, a picture is worth a thousand words.
- Let them **observe** others before attempting new tasks. They learn by watching.
- Use **visualization** techniques. *(See Jeff Freed's article.)*
- Teach them to use **computers** and let them do assignments with the assistance of a word processor.
- **Shorten** written assignments. Grade on ideas, not mechanics.
- **Avoid timed tests.** If they must take them, let them compete against their own past record, rather than with other children.
- Buy a ***Bad Speller's Dictionary*** (organized by misspellings!) and allow them to look up words.
- Give them **advanced work** even when they haven't mastered simple, sequential tasks.
- Engage a **tutor** who can help them learn to use their strengths to compensate for their weaknesses.

These techniques may not cure the problem, but they will help "spacey" children be more successful in school.

(NOTE: For more information, see "Invisible Gifts, Invisible Handicaps.")

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Linda Silverman, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist and Director of the Gifted Child Development Center in Denver, Colorado.

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IN SEARCH OF SERENDIPITY

Creative Ventures And Encounters

Jerry Flack
Tour Guide

The lazy days of summer provide a wonderful time for gifted youth to channel their creative energies into writing opportunities which are both fun and productive. The media used may include everything from quill pens to word processors. The key is to encourage young people to utilize, develop, and enhance their communication skills. The following prompts may be given to young people for use both at home or in summer programs.

Pretend you have been shipwrecked and marooned on a Pacific Island. Ten items have survived the shipwreck and are at your disposal. What ten items would you most want to save? Provide at least one reason for wanting each item. Write a creative story using all ten items in the narrative. Don't forget to write about the harrowing experience of the shipwreck.

Choose an athlete whom you admire and follow his or her career throughout the summer. Imagine yourself to be a reporter working on a book or a serial feature article about the athlete. Structure a series of interviews with the subject. Each entry or passage should reflect events really happening in the athlete's life. How does each victory or defeat affect the subject? What reasons are given for particular victories or defeats? Add creative illustrations to the overall profile. At the end of the summer when the profile is complete, send a copy to the subject.

Create a character who goes to summer camp. The character might be a precocious and highly inquisitive child, a talented young artist, or a gifted youth with a remarkable talent for solving mysteries. Next, imagine that you are a camp counselor who has the character in your charge. Write a series of letters, camp memos, conversations with the character, or witnessed interactions between the character and others which reveal the many humorous adventures and exploits of a summer camp experience.

Write an "Imagine Me" poem about an imagined summer experience. There is no hard and fast format for this type of poem, except that the first line should begin with the words "Imagine Me." The remainder of the poem highlights the imagined adventure or accomplishment. Here is one example:

Imagine Me

Imagine Me, Michelle,
Playing the piano at Carnegie Hall.
Hours of practice!
Imagine me, soaring through a
Beethoven composition,
Just breezing along,
Making no mistakes,
Giving a flawless interpretation.
Just Perfect! Ah . . . .

Create an encyclopedia story. First, recall that a good story always has an exciting plot, interesting characters, a unique setting, and an intriguing theme. Select any volume from a set of encyclopedias and write a story in which all the characters, settings, and plot happenings begin with the same alphabetical letter. For instance, the story might be titled "The Saga of a Stolen Soprano Saxophone," and might involve Santa Claus, Shakespeare, and Sacajawea as characters. All might be searching for a stolen saxophone and travel to Santa Fe, Siberia, Spain, and Seattle on their sojourn.

These few prompts should help start the flow of creative ideas in the minds of creative young writers. Many, many other ideas will surface once young people make creative writing an integral part of each summer day.

Jerry Flack, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Gifted Education at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and editor of *GIT News*.

ANTENNA . . . .

Current Developments in Gifted Education

"When it hurts enough, you do something!"

A parent of a gifted second grader was told that the school district was in process of educational restructuring and gifted and talented education was on hold. Her son would have to learn to put his potential on hold and conform to the second grade curriculum.

It hurt enough – and a meeting was arranged for parents with similar concerns. The room was small, but the parents kept coming in until they sat on the floor and stood in the back.

You could almost hear the battle cry as these parents, each one an advocate for an individual child, banded together to form a support group for all gifted and talented students in that district. They joined the state association, and instead of one voice, each parent in that crowded room stood for 1000 voices across the entire state.

It still hurt, but the hurt was now shared by others who suffered the same pain. Relief was provided by the optimism of positive effective action and the challenge of success for each child represented in that room.

We have seen the results of parent advocacy in the area of special education. Positive reforms occurred in the 1970's for mentally retarded, learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, developmentally disabled and other handicapped students. Parents were the driving force behind the passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and related legislation. Why? Because it hurt enough, and they did something.

My son developed pneumonia in the seventh grade. He missed six weeks of school. When he was finally well enough to return, his teachers told him he had no make-up work. At first I was impressed by their concern for his physical well being and their reluctance to overtax him. But this bright student, who spent his convalescence designing computer programs and reading Joyce's *Ulysses*, asked." Why did I go back to school? I didn't even miss anything!" And it hurt.

So I – and other parents – did something. We pressed for differentiated education for gifted students. Our task was not easy. My lone voice would not have been strong enough, but the combined voices of an organization accomplished that goal in our community.

Parents, don't wait for it to hurt enough. It's easier to be proactive than reactive. This is a time of fundamental change in education. Become agents of that change and ensure that gifted and talented children have a secure and challenging place in which to reach their full potential.

Dorothy Knopper is State Consultant on the Gifted, Colorado Department of Education and "Open Space" columnist for *Roeper Review*.

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from parent to parent

One of the most difficult issues for parents of young gifted children is the question of who to tell and how specific to get. Parents have to balance the need to share confidential information about their child's development and test scores in order to justify curriculum modifications, with the danger of developing a reputation for the child founded on hearsay and myth.

Kay and Bill Carter relate comments from well-meaning friends and teachers that suggest how easy it is to assume you know a child's personality because you know something about his or her ability level. "One teacher said, 'You're so nice, you wouldn't even know your child is smart!' Another teacher explained to her class that our son, Ryan, would be making a grade skip and was very bright – but still liked recess and in all other ways was quite normal. The teacher was trying to help smooth the way for Ryan, but what she actually did was to make it much harder for him to slip in unnoticed."

In the case of a gifted child who requires acceleration, no one but the teacher needs to know the actual age of the child. In many cases the students are so good at fitting in socially that there is no way to tell their age is not the same as their classmates.

Ryan, a highly gifted eight year old, gets along well with his classmates despite their age differences, and prefers to be allowed to develop a relationship with the other kids before they find out he's gifted. "I want the opportunity to go to school and just be one of the kids."

In addition, he regrets his celebrity status, saying "Why is this anybody's business? Is it any of my business that they're taking remedial math?"

School officials often underestimate the need for confidentiality when dealing with a gifted child. It is usually assumed that meetings held behind closed doors will be considered private, but well-meaning teachers sometimes break their silence on a child whose school program is different. The temptation is all too human. An unusual approach to schooling is a subject few people can resist discussing at length, nor should they. (This writer is committed to encouraging discussion about the many ways to make the trip from kindergartner to educated adult.) However, the names of the students involved and the results of testing, etc., should be protected.

As Kay Carter laments, "Do I have to tell everyone 'This information is confidential'?"

The Carters suggest that principals and department heads take the lead at meetings by reminding their staffs to respect the privacy of the family. "In our experience, it's much better coming from another school official than coming from parents."

No matter how confident parents may seem concerning the course they have outlined for their child, they are not unaffected by rumor, and should not have to explain their child's program to anyone who is not directly involved.

As Kay puts it: "I know I'm doing the right thing but it's hard to ignore the odd comments. I'm not an armored tank, just a parent."

Lisa Ferguson is from Haverill, Massachusetts and the parent of highly gifted children.

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